

S E R M O N S

ON

USEFUL AND IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN COSENS, D.D.

MINISTER OF TEDDINGTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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S E R M O N S

W O

USEFUL AND IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

ITALY

REF. JOHN COOPER, D.D.



THE TWO OLD MEN

JOY

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THE
C O N T E N T S.

VOLUME II.

SERMON XV.

Elisha's Miracle of Mercy.

Page

Preached before the Society for the
Relief of Prisoners confined for small
Debts.

2 KINGS, vi. latter part of 5th verse.

*And he cried, and said, Alas! Master,
for it was borrowed.*

3

SERMON XVI.

The Qualifications for Heavenly
Happiness.

REV. xxii. 14. *Blessed are they that
do his commandments, that they may
have right to the tree of Life, and
may enter in through the Gates into
the City.*

37

A 2

SER

iv CONTENTS.

2 SERMON XVII.

Page

The Delusions of the Heart.

PSALM, XXXvi. 2. *He flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful.*

63

SERMON XVIII.

Forgiveness of Injuries, by the Example of Joseph.

GENESIS, xlv. 4 & 5. *And Joseph said unto his brethren, come near to me, I pray you; and they came near: and he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you, to preserve life.*

89

SERMON XIX.

Sanctify a Fast.

A Sermon for Lent.

JOEL, ii. 15, 16, 17, & 18. *Blow the*

trum-

CONTENTS.

Page

*trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call
a solemn assembly:*

*Gather the people, sanctify the congrega-
tion; assemble the elders: gather the
children, and those that suck the breasts.*

*Let the bridegroom go forth of his
chamber, and the bride out of her
closet.*

*Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,
weep between the porch and the altar,
and let them say, spare thy people, O
Lord! and give not thine heritage to
reproach, that the heathen should
rule over them, wherefore should they
say among the people—where is their
God? Then will the Lord be jealous
for his land, and pity his people.*

113

SERMON XX.

*The Nature and Efficacy of Repentance.
Rahab justified.*

*JAMES ii. latter part of the 25th verse.
Likewise, also was not Rahab, the
harlot, justified?*

141

SER-

SERMON XXI.

The Duty of Publick Worship.

PSALM, xxvi. 12. *My foot standeth right, I will praise the Lord in the Congregations.* 167

SERMON XXII.

Objections to Prayer refuted.

JOB, xxi. latter part of 15th. *What profit should we have if we pray unto him?* 187

SERMON XXIII.

The Case of Herod:

Or, the Duty of glorifying God, explained and enforced.

ACTS, xii. 23. *And immediately the Angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.* 217

SER-

CONTENTS.

vi

Page

SERMON XXIV.

The Chain of Sin, or, the Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist.

MARK, vi. 27 & 28. *And immediately the King sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought. And he went, and beheaded him in prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel; and the damsel gave it to her mother.* 245

SERMON XXV.

The Government of the Passions.

I KINGS, xix. 11, 12, & former part of the 13th. *And he said go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire, but the*

viii CONTENTS.

Page

*Lord was not in the fire: and after
the fire a still small voice. And it
was so when Elijah heard it—that he
wrapped his face in his mantle.* 273

SERMON XXVI.

Mysteries vindicated from the Charge
of Inconsistencies.

St. MATT. xxii. 45th verse. *If David
then call him Lord, how is he his Son.* 303

SERMON XXVII.

Summary of Scripture Evidence.

2 Epist. St. PETER, latter part of 21st.
verse. *Holy Men of God spake as
they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* 333

SERMON XXVIII.

Agur's Prayer.

BOOK OF PROVERBS, xxx. 7th & 8th.
*Two things have I required of thee;
deny me them not before I dye! Remove
far from me Vanity and Lies; give
me neither Poverty nor Riches: Feed
me with food convenient for me,* 369

S E R M O N XV.

ELISHA'S MIRACLE OF MERCY.

PREACHED BEFORE THE SOCIETY FOR THE
RELIEF OF PRISONERS CONFINED FOR
SMALL DEBTS.

VOL. II.

B

S E R M O N XV.



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SMALL DEBTS.

D

Vol. II.

S E R M O N XV.

*And he cried, and said, Alas! Master,
for it was borrowed.*

2 Kings, vi. latter part of 5th verse.

THERE is an elegant simplicity in the S E R M.
XV.
little narrative to which these words refer, which, as it is the native language of truth, so has it never failed to *recommend* itself to the taste of all persons of real refinement, capable of distinguishing intrinsic excellency, from the false splendor of affected diction.

It was reserved for the disgrace of these latter times to produce men, who, professing themselves to be wise are ever ready to shew their title to superior judgement by ridiculing what they do not comprehend,

SERM. and depreciating what they want capacity
 XV. to feel.

If it be true that the moral sense is the genuine source of intellectual discernment; it would be an easy task to account for their insensibility to the transcendent beauties of sacred scripture, at the same time that they pretend the highest admiration of every other species of fine writing.

Whence is it—says an ancient and eminent critick—that a discourse is esteemed exquisitely adorned by an apt quotation from Pindar or Euripides, and yet rendered contemptible by the introduction of a sublime passage from the inspired prophets of the true God? Ahab, king of Israel, shall answer the question:—"I hate the prophets of the LORD (says he) because they never prophecy good concerning me, but evil." The truth is, unless we have a good heart as well as a clear head—a readiness to believe and obey, as well as to understand, we shall labour under

Elisha's Miracle of Mercy.

5

under an acquired *incapacity* to receive delight from the books of revelation.

SERM.
XV.

To the jaundiced eye of scepticism, and the vitiated palate of immorality, the cedars of the LORD appear crooked, the balance of the sanctuary uneven, and the rivers that flow down from the pure fountain of infinite wisdom impregnated with the gall of bitterness.

But I trust our present business is not with such. The case before us was this: on Gilgal, near the banks of the river Jordan, was a celebrated school or college of the prophets; which, it seems, was so crowded with students, when *Elisha* was president, that the scholars made a proposal of erecting some additional buildings for their accommodation. “The sons of
“the prophet said unto Elisha, behold now
“the place where we dwell with thee is
“too strait for us. Let us go, we pray
“thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every
“man a beam—or piece of timber—and

B 3

let

SERM.
XV.

“let us make us a place there, where we
“may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.”

Having obtained his consent, their veneration for his most benevolent and respectable character induced them to beg his company and advice in their undertaking, which they believed would derive a blessing both on the edifice and its future inhabitants. “And one said, be content, I pray thee, and go *with* thy servants. “And he answered I will go.”

Presently afterwards we find their progress in the work suddenly interrupted by an accident, which, to men who cannot familiarise their notions to the simplicity of those early ages of the world, may appear too mean and inconsiderable for the dignity of history to record it. “As one was felling a tree, the ax-head slipt off, and fell into the water: and he cried and said, Alas! master, for it was *borrowed*.”

It may serve to reconcile the fastidious admirers of pagan wisdom to this incident,
just

just to remind them, that not quite a cen-
tury before the period in which we are now
concerned, the supposed *inventor* of this
and a few other mechanical instruments
(at the present day so cheap and common
among us) was celebrated as one of the
greatest benefactors of mankind, and the
name of *Dadalus* has been, on that account,
transmitted with honour to posterity.

SERM.
XV.

For us it will be sufficient to recollect,
that the sacred volumes being written by
wise and good men, either wholly and im-
mediately *inspired*, or at least *assisted* by the
spirit of God, in what they recorded, to
be convinced that they cannot contain any
thing that is really frivolous and in-
considerable—any thing that will not supply
important matter of instruction, if atten-
tively considered and thoroughly under-
stood. The *minute* facts which they re-
late will be generally found, upon strict ex-
amination, of great and real use in the
conduct of life. This should teach us

B 4

SERM. the modesty to suspend our judgement; and
 XV. not presently to reject the narrative because
 we cannot infer the moral.

In the record before us we have the lamentation of an upright honest man, expressing the deepest affliction, not because he had the misfortune to lose a very necessary and valuable utensil, but because he had lost what belonged to another person, and which it was now out of his power to restore to its owner. "He cried and said, alas! master, for it was *borrowed*."

There is no such thing as a *trifle* in nature, where honor and probity are concerned. When a person of ingenuous sentiments has contracted a debt, which it is afterwards out of his power to satisfy, convinced that he has offended against the immutable laws of justice and charity, his conscience will immediately deliver him to the tormentor though his creditor should forbear.

The good prophet had already distinguished himself as the debtor's friend,
 in

in the case of the poor widow woman of Sarepta. He perceived in an instant the emphasis of his scholar's lamentation; and commiserating his feelings, did not think it unbecoming his holy character, even to work a *miracle* on the spot for his relief:—as well to enable him to quiet his own mind, by satisfying his creditor, as to vindicate the society from the imputation of converting to their own use the property of another. We read in the verse immediately following the text, that “the
“ man of God said, where fell it?” and
“ he showed him the place, and he cut
“ down a stick, and cast it in thither, and
“ the iron did *swim*; and he put out his
“ hand and took it.”

The ceremony was intended merely to excite and fix the attention of those about him; and the miracle—a temporary suspension of the power of gravitation—was performed and recorded as an everlasting lesson to them, and every succeeding generation both of justice and of mercy: of
justice,

SERM.
XV.

SERM.
XV.

justice, in religiously *restoring* whatever we have borrowed, and conscientiously satisfying our creditors; and of mercy, in using all means within the compass of our abilities to enable the insolvent debtor to do it. These great and necessary principles of civil life were thus *visibly* taught, illustrated, and confirmed.

The *justice* of the case then, intimated by the pathetick lamentation of the borrower, shall constitute the first topick of my following discourse.

The *mercy* of it I shall consider in the second place—exemplified by the prophet's amiable, instructive solicitude to deliver a poor honest man from the painful consequences of an unsatisfied debt. Which, I apprehend, evidently and immediately applies to the benevolent institution, which I have this day the honor to recommend.

After which you will indulge me in a short appeal to the bosom of sensibility to induce

Elisha's Miracle of Mercy.

11

induce you to imitate what you cannot but
admire and applaud.

SERMON
XV.

And for the first of these—the lesson of *social honesty*, so forcibly inculcated by the miracle—it may be thought expedient to set out with this, to convince the malignant gainlayer that it is, to the last degree, remote from the intention of the honourable patrons of the charity, either to introduce any laxity in the most rigid laws of *retribution*, or to encourage the unprincipled to contract debts, in hopes of finding relief from this last exchequer of the deserted and helpless poor. If it ever has, in one single instance, been abused to such purposes—and what human institution is there, however wisely calculated, and prudently conducted, that can pretend to an exemption from all abuse?—we are now entering our most solemn and publick protest against it.

We insist then that the duty of the debtor is so evidently founded on the eternal

nal

SERM.
 XV.
 } nal laws of justice and charity, written in the heart of every reasonable creature, that nothing but these insinuations, and our experience of the present state of the world, with respect to practical morality, could induce us to offer any proof of its obligation among those who profess and call themselves Christians.

It will not be doubted by any but the most profligate atheists, that as the earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof, even all things in it, by his original transcendent right of *creation*; so, in whatever manner he shall be pleased, by his unquestionable providence, to distribute them; that right becomes vested in the possessors by the highest and most sacred authority. Indeed, this is the only adequate and primitive idea of property. So that whether our possessions are transmitted by succession from our ancestors, or are our own personal acquisition, by lawful purchase, earning, or exchange, the validity of our claims must still be ultimately referred to,
 and

and manifestly depend on, the same original grant from the supreme LORD of all, who has impressed his own mark on every atom of his works.

SERM.
XV.

Accordingly all civilised nations upon the face of the globe—convinced by the mere voice of nature—have unanimously agreed to brand with indelible infamy, the confounders of *meum et tuum*, as utterly unqualified for society; regarding the distinction as a principle enwoven into the very nature of man, and inseparable from the existence of a moral agent.

Now, from this it is an obvious consequence, that whatever we may have of our neighbour's in our possession must be conscientiously restored; that, not to satisfy his just demand of retribution, or even to retain, without his consent, any portion of that property, which the laws of God have assigned, or to which those of our country entitle him, is to disgrace and degrade our own nature—as much as lies in our power to arraign the divine justice,

SERM.
XV.

tice, and blasphemously deny his right to do what he will with his own. It is utterly impossible we should even *conceive* a title superiour to his, which is supported by such evident—such paramount authority.

Can it be imagined that the mere plea of occupancy or possession will justify us in opposition to prior right, yet unextinguished; when that very possession was notoriously acquired either by violence, by fraud, or by confidential loan at first, and was afterwards continued at the expence of common justice and humanity?

Is there a wretch among us so abandoned as to avow these flagitious principles, without being universally abhorred? or to be detected in the application of them without the deepest confusion? Suppose every man to adopt the same—and every man has equal pretence—now, consider with me a moment what tumult, tyranny, violence, and confusion must inevitably follow. Every man's house must be literally his castle,

castle, regularly fortified and defended, the market a field of battle, and the exchange a den of thieves. Lust and avarice would then be law, and bloodshed and murder the general forms of taking possession. Nothing more would be necessary to establish right than opportunity, and force sufficient to possess and occupy. Even the infamous process of a *Jezebel* would be thought superfluous ceremony; and every poor defenceless man might lose the inheritance of his fathers, without even the imputation of having blasphemed God and the King. In short, our very reason thus subservient to fraud, rapine, and violence, would soon render us more dangerous to each other than the inexorable fury of the beasts of the field; and all human society must necessarily be dissolved.

From hence only the obligations incumbent on us to cultivate in our hearts the sacred principles of justice and honesty—that is, an habitual disposition to restore what we have borrowed, and to pay what

SERM. we owe—must be evident and demonstra-
 XV. ble to the meanest capacity. *Blasphemy*

If we consider ourselves as moral agents, that most comprehensive and equitable rule, of doing to others as we would they should do unto us, will abundantly illustrate and enforce the interesting duty before us. Suppose the circumstances changed, that he who is now our creditor was indebted to us—would any sophistry reconcile us to the detention of our undoubted property? Could we ever argue ourselves into a consent that he should consume our hard-earned substance—the bread of our wives and helpless children—as if it were his own? Could you bear with patience to see the arms of laziness; the back of pride, and the belly of luxury cloathed and pampered out of the poor savings of whole years of your own industry and self-denial? The contrary is notorious. I am persuaded it would be found, upon examination, that one half of the imprisonments of the lower order of debtors, at the

the present day, proceed rather from the acrimony of *resentment*, than from any expectations of compelling payment. How else can we possibly account for their being condemned to languish in the cells of misery one day after the creditor is convinced that satisfaction is impossible? This—whatever it proves besides—plainly declares our high notions of the sacredness of property.

SERM.
XV.

Now can we be so blinded by inveterate selfishness—so infatuated by avarice, as to think we can justify doing that in another's case, which we so deeply resent in our own?

It may *often* happen—GOD knows it *does* happen now almost every day, that the refusal of payment may prove the utter ruin of our neighbour, and reduce him to such difficulties as may be too mighty both for his reason and health; and send a whole innocent ingenuous family to beg and seek out their bread in desolate places. In such instances, every principle of religion,

SERM.
XV.

gion, every dictate of genuine honour, every law of humanity, requires us to impart something of our own towards their support and relief. For, "whofo hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him;" so far from deserving the name of a Christian, he hardly deserves that of a human creature.

And if it be so horridly wicked merely to *permit* our poor fellow-creature to remain in distress, when it is in our power to relieve him; how unspeakably must their turpitude be aggravated, who have been the immediate authors and causes of his misfortunes, by with-holding from him that, which, by all the laws of God and man, is his own property. How must it excite both our pity and our indignation to see the honest industrious tradesman, who was perfectly contented in his humble station—serviceable to the public in general, and employing a number of inferior workmen—crushed, ruined in a mo-

ment by the unexpected bankruptcy of men, who have supported their own luxury, pride, and importance, by imposing on the credulity of their neighbour.

SERM.

XV.

Can the wilful and deliberate insolvent pretend to the love and fear of God, or to any principles of true religion? It is contemptible hypocrisy and falsehood. For "he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath *seen*,"—who is subject to the same wants, disappointments, sorrows, and sufferings with himself—"how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?"

But the final issue and event of all things will shew, to the whole assembled creation, that such men have been as egregious *fools*, as they were contemptible knaves. The most silent and secret sorrows of their injured, impoverished neighbour shall certainly be heard; and the curse of the LORD God of Hosts shall enter into the house of the *thief*—for such, in his sight, is every fraudulent dealer and debtor—and shall remain in the midst of his house, and utterly consume it. "Behold the bread of

SERM.
XV.

“ the needy, which is of you kept back,
“ crieth aloud, and the cry is entered into
“ the ears of the LORD.” They may elude
the laws of their country ;—the frequency
of such characters may prevail on some to
connive at their baseness : but what ac-
count shall they render of their stewardship
in that great and terrible day, when every
species of wilful dishonesty, of deliberate
fraud—every just debt, which it was in
their power to have satisfied, shall expose
them to the contempt of devils, and the
wrath of omnipotence ?

There is, no doubt, a duty of candor,
patience and forgiveness on the *creditor's*
part, as well as of probity on the *debtor's* ;
but let it be for ever remembered, that his
total want of charity cannot, in one single
instance, be pleaded for your want of ho-
nesty.

Having thus, to obviate the suggestions
of malevolence, patiently and deliberately
stated the demands of *Justice*, it is pre-
sumed we may now irreproachably listen to
the gentle pleadings of *Mercy*.

If

If it be true, that the ceasing of credit would be the destruction of commerce, or, as some have insisted, the dissolution of society; and that, therefore, as things are now constituted, mutual credit is inevitable; it is obvious that from a variety of different causes, frequent instances of insolvency cannot but occur. Here it is that every man's reason must make the distinction, according to the particular nature of the case, to which the law, acting by general rules, cannot attend. The end of all civil regulations should be to secure private happiness from private malignity—to exempt individuals from the tyranny of each other. But it is to be lamented as an incurable fault in our, otherwise, excellent constitution, that no provision of this kind is made in the subject before us. The insolent wickedness and folly of the customs of duelling have been abundantly exposed from this consideration; that in the courts of modern honor, the offended party himself is invested with the powers

SERM.
XV.

of judge, jury, and executioner. This has been always thought an insult on common sense. And yet here—and I hope and believe here alone, a similar impropriety is silently permitted, if not authorised by the laws of our country:—a man, irritated by loss, and provoked by injury, is suffered to be arbitrator in his own cause, and to assign the punishment of his own pain. Here the great, necessary, moral distinction between fraud and misfortune, between inevitable accident and deliberate design, between innocent want of ability, and criminal want of principle, is entirely trusted to eyes blinded with interest, and to understandings disordered by resentment. And when men take counsel of their passions, instead of reason and religion, we cannot be surprised if the most *blameless* insolvency, arising from a combination of distresses, which no human prudence could foresee, or human strength divert, should be found an insufficient protection of the person of the debtor from the licensed fury of his creditor.

Has

Has not the very bed of languishing, SERM. XV.
sickness and sorrow, the last sanctuary of
helpless and friendless poverty been pro-
faned by hired ruffians, callous to every
feeling of humanity; and the broken-
hearted unoffending borrower dragged
thence to the common receptacles of in-
famous guilt and vice, merely to gratify
the rage of the lender? Against this in-
discriminate violence the laws of our
country have provided no security or re-
dress: apprehending, perhaps, that by a
too easy dissolution of debts, fraud might
be left without punishment, and impru-
dence without awe; and that when in-
solvency shall be no longer punishable,
credit may cease. Still, therefore, "the
law is good, if men would but *use* it
lawfully." Perhaps too it might have
been thought, that common reason, or, at
least, religion, would have suggested to
every man in this land of liberty and
science, such rules of conduct as must
render a legal distinction as unnecessary as
it was difficult.

SERM.

XV.

The experience of ages has, however, demonstrated that the legislature has, in this instance, trusted power in improper hands. An appeal to the reason of the avaricious, the sordid, and the vindictive—to any one whose sensibility is obliterated by inveterate selfishness—must be as fruitless as an application to his generosity. He hath stopped his ears to the cry of his own flesh and blood, and how shall he attend to the sighs of the stranger? Or can he, who hath deliberately said to gold, thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, thou art my confidence—who is convinced that this is the wisdom and prudence, and whole duty of man upon earth;—can such a one, I ask, without a miracle of God's grace, ever be expected to give a hearty, practical assent to religious doctrines, which have an evident tendency to make his sacred mammon subservient to charity? “The kingdom of heaven—or
“the true vital genius of christianity—
“is likened unto a certain king, who
“would take account of his servants.

“And

“ And one was brought unto him, who
“ owed him ten thousand talents; but
“ forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord
“ commanded him to be sold, and his
“ wife and children, and all that he had,
“ and payment to be made. The servant,
“ therefore, sunk down in anguish and
“ sorrow before him, saying lord have pa-
“ tience with me, and I will pay thee
“ all. Then the lord of that servant was
“ moved with compassion, and released
“ him, and forgave him the debt.”

SERM.
XV.

This divine parable has been now constantly read, explained, and enforced among us, for many centuries of years. Each individual is convinced that *he himself* is the poor insolvent servant thus generously released through the ineffable goodness of God; by that work and labor of love—Redemption. Every holy motive of hope and fear has been incessantly urged to prevail on us, in like manner, to *forgive* from our hearts “ every one his brother, “ who has not to pay.”

And

SERM.
XV.

And yet does not this same servant still go out, with malicious diligence, in search of one of his fellow-servants, who owes him but an hundred pence? Is it not an every day's occurrence, to find him laying hands on him, taking him by the throat, and, with an insolence that would disgrace a barbarian, saying, pay me *that thou owest?* convinced as he is, at the very moment, that mere innocent want of ability, and not of inclination, is the sole cause of his insolvency. Nay, this reasonable motive to forbearance and pity has been frequently known to be itself the very provocation for his depriving him of every remaining comfort of life, and forcing him into a loathsome prison; not to extort payment, but to inflict punishment. And here the helpless offender must languish at the will of his tyrant;—secluded from all converse with his friends—from all desirable society, associated with baseness and infamy, with filthiness and disease, and destitute of an appeal to the justice of his country. What a spectacle for humanity! A Briton miserable

ferable without guilt—in such a situation, most miserable when least guilty—languishing for liberty with groanings which cannot be uttered;

SERMON
XV.

“God’s image disinherited of day;”
and an object of redeeming-love “clean
“forgotten, as a *dead* man out of mind,
“cast aside like a broken vessel.”

The eye of compassion at length pierced through the gloom of the dungeon, and its ear heard the melting complaints of the oppressed. Yes! much peace and happiness, and blessing and honor rest upon the heads and hearts of those, who so seasonably instituted this benevolent society for their discharge and relief. They were utterly lost to themselves, and to the community—sunk, like the *iron* in my text, in the deepest waters of affliction, and hardly any thing inferior to the prophet’s miracle of mercy could have effected their recovery. Many hundreds, however, have been already delivered and restored to the publick. And if the funds of the charity

SERM. rity bore any proportion to the glorious
 XV, zeal of its patrons, the affecting petitions
 of so many more unexceptionable objects
 of distress had not been this day submitted
 to your consideration.

Let, therefore, I beseech you, let the
 sorrowful sighings of the prisoner come
 before you, according to the greatness and
 goodness of your hearts, O deliver those
 who are appointed to destruction! Be-
 hold and see if there be any sorrow like
 unto their sorrow, wherewith they are
 now afflicted.

Let your imagination conduct you to
 the dwellings of ingenuous poverty, where
 patient industry, wont to prevent the rising
 sun, nor cease with his decline, has been
 unavoidably intermitted by a lingering
 sickness; which, by utterly disabling the
 master of the family, has broke the staff
 of their bread. They could not starve;
 to beg they were ashamed. A few trifling
debts have, therefore, been inevitably con-
 tracted to procure the common necessities
 of life. See the poor, honest man, pale,
 faint,

Elisba's Miracle of Mercy.

29

faint, and dispirited, dropping the silent
tear of anguish into the bosom of his faith-
ful wife, the once chearful partner of his
labors, surrounded by the dear pledges of
their love, for whom they bereaved their
souls of rest, and denied themselves many
an innocent gratification. All their fair
hopes of making a provision for themselves
and children are now utterly blasted. He
is *declining* apace, without a probability of
being able to retrieve his former situation,
or exempt the future from the approaching
horrors of extremest poverty.

SERM.
XV.

“ Tell me (he cries) thou friend of my
“ bosom! to whose tender cares of me on
“ the bed of languishing it is owing, un-
“ der God, that I am now alive to com-
“ plain—is there a circumstance of mi-
“ sery wanting to complete the measure
“ of our sufferings? Yes, there is one,
“ and it is even now at hand. For lo!
“ the inexorable creditor is come, and I
“ shall be immediately forced, torne from
“ the only comfort I have upon the face
“ of

SERM.

XV.

“ of the earth, the society of my wife and
 “ children. This stroke has exhausted
 “ all my fortitude; has quenched the last
 “ trembling beam of humble hope. For
 “ the sake of these weeping infants, spare
 “ ye ministers of vengeance and oppression,
 “ O spare me a little, that I may recover
 “ my strength before I go hence and am
 “ no more seen!” Such are the objects
 of distress, which this blessed institution
 recommends to the commiseration of a
 generous public: they appeal to every
 tender sensibility of the human soul.

You that are husbands—you that are
 fathers, friends, brothers among us will
feel, for I am unable to *describe*, the pangs
 of such a separation. To those feelings
 I shall now remit you; in full confidence
 that your liberality, upon this most affect-
 ing occasion, will do equal honor to your
 judgement as citizens, to your faith as
 Christians, and to your good-nature as
 Englishmen.

Many

Many of you have never had an opportunity of contributing to this charity before. If therefore you have much give plenteously, if you have little, do your diligence gladly to give of that little; for so gatherest thou thyself a good reward in the time of necessity, a sustaining comfort in the season of sickness, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgement.

SERM.
XV.

GOD is not unrighteous that he should forget your works and labor that proceedeth from love, which love ye have shewed for his name's sake, and in obedience to his holy commands.

To Him, with the Son and Holy Spirit, the adorable GOD of mercy and compassion, who redeemed every soul of man from the everlasting chains of darkness—be glory, honor, and praise, constant, profound, ardent, and eternal. Amen.

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 showed for his name's sake, and in obedience
 to his holy commandment.

To him with the good and Holy Spirit
 the adorable God of mercy and comfort
 from, who redeemed every soul of man
 from the everlasting chains of darkness—
 be glory, honor, and praise, constant
 perpetual, abundant, and eternal. Amen

S E R M O N XVI.

THE QUALIFICATIONS
FOR
HEAVENLY HAPPINESS.

Vol. II.

D

THE COMMON

THE QUALIFICATIONS

NECESSARY FOR

VOL. II.

D

S E R M O N XVI.

*Blessed are they that do his commandments,
that they may have right to the tree of
Life, and may enter in, through the gates
into the city.*

Revelations, xxii. 14.

THERE is a stupendous height and SERM.
XV.
depth in the stile and composition
of this divine book, that can be equalled
by nothing but the venerable and myste-
rious truths which are the subject of it.
In the chapter preceding this of my text,
we have a most magnificent and affecting
description of the Holy City, the new Je-
rusalem, which is represented as coming
down from God, out of heaven, where all
tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and

SERM.
XVI.

there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying :—a city that hath no need of the Sun, neither of the Moon to shine in it, for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb be the light thereof. Whether this be applicable to the church of JESUS CHRIST, in its last glorified state, for a thousand years, here upon earth, or triumphant to all eternity, in Heaven, it is beside my present purpose to enquire. In either state the terms of admission are precisely one and the same. We are told, at the 27th verse, “ There shall in no wise “ enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, “ or maketh a lie ; but they which are “ written in the Lamb’s book of life”—correspondent to that in the 8th verse ; “ but the fearful—or worldly minded— “ and unbelieving, and the abominable, “ and murderers, and whoremongers and “ idolaters, and all liars, shall have their “ part in the lake that burneth with fire “ and brimstone, which is the second “ death.

“ death.” The qualifications of those SERM.
XVI.
who shall partake of its ineffable glory and happiness are clearly and precisely determined in the words of my text, and which are introduced and seconded by a solemnity equal to the dignity and interesting importance of the doctrine: “ I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last ! Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of Life, and may enter in, through the gates, into the city. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things unto you in the churches ; I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and the Morning Star.”

God hath spoken, and let human wisdom attend with silent adoration. We have here then a final and satisfactory answer to that great question, so natural to the soul of man ; “ What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ? ” We must, in the first place, sin-

SERM.
XVI.

cerely endeavour to divest ourselves of every species of intemperance and uncleanness, pride and covetousness, fraud and injustice, uncharitableness and hatred, cruelty and oppression: for some copies of the Greek Testament read the words, "blessed are they that *wash their garments*," that is, solicitously cleanse themselves from all the impure habits of immorality and sin, by effectual repentance. The next step to be taken is to put on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and become positively virtuous, eminent patterns of sobriety and chastity, humility and contentment, truth and honesty, justice and fidelity, charity and love; that is, in one word, we must be habitually disposed to do his commandments.

These, therefore, are the terms of justification—the qualifications by which we acquire a new title to a glorious immortality; or in the language of the text, have a right to, or *power* over, the tree of Life; the regular, appointed means, by which
we

we must enter in, *through the gates*, into the city. SERM.
XVI.

As this is a subject, which comes immediately home to every man's business and bosom; I trust I shall engage your serious attention, while I endeavour to demonstrate before you,

In the *first* place, that there are no other means of justification, or hopes of future happiness to be depended on.

And *secondly*, that this is a *certain* and infallible one to the great and glorious end proposed to us; and that nothing but our own voluntary blindness, invincible obstinacy, or unpardonable negligence, can hinder us from applying those means, and enjoying their blessed consequence and effect.

These, it must be confessed, are very plain and obvious topics, and of which we might imagine no one could be ignorant, who has the Gospel of JESUS

SERM.
XVI.

CHRIST in his hands. And yet, who among us but has heard men talk of leaning on the person of their Redeemer—embracing him with the arms of love, and by faith applying his righteousness to themselves as all that is necessary to salvation? It has been repeatedly insisted, from a misapprehension of a few difficult texts in scripture, that we need not be over-solicitous about the observance of God's commandments ourselves, because they have been already perfectly obeyed for us—that the treasury of merit is thrown open, and the wickeder we now are, if we do but avail ourselves of that by faith, the more acceptable we shall be hereafter. Of this horrible doctrine, I shall only observe, that it is not the single instance in which enthusiasm and popery have met together, and kissed each other.

But whatever aims to satisfy men's consciences, without habitual, moral holiness, or to be substituted for it, is so evident an affront to all the Divine Attributes

at

at once—so palpable a delusion of the Devil; that the times must be our apology, if in refuting it, we are frequently obliged to insist on the commonest truths, and to teach again the first principles of the Oracles of God.

SERM.
XVI.

Besides, is there any among us whose practice is equal to his knowledge? Do we not all lay out ourselves on the trifles of a moment to the neglect of this pearl of great price—eternal life? If our deluded brethren are unholy upon principle, we are irreligious against it.

Let it then be considered, that our title to immortal glory is not founded on any innate, natural merit or sufficiency of our own—and happy for us that it is not; for, alas! we have not the smallest degree of either: but being purchased at no less a price than the most precious blood of the only begotten Son of God; it is most highly reasonable we should expect it only upon those terms, which he proposes and requires.

Now

SERM.
XVI.

Now what those are is so clearly specified that no sincere honest enquirer can long be ignorant of them. We need only consult our bibles to be satisfactorily convinced. We have there a faithful record of all that is necessary to salvation. What is written in the law? How readest thou? "Thou shalt love the LORD thy
" GOD with all thy heart, and with all
" thy soul, and with all thy strength, and
" with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as
" thyself. This do, and thou shalt live."

An habitual attention to these duties then is universally necessary, though not as the efficient, meritorious cause, for that is the sacrifice of the death of CHRIST only, yet as the indispensable means or condition on which everlasting happiness is suspended. And one might wonder how it could ever enter into the heart of man to conceive that any other means, qualifications or performances whatsoever could possibly be substituted for them. With equal reason may we expect to obtain any temporal end without using its natural means

—to reap without sowing, to grow healthy by intemperance, rich by indolence, and wise by ignorance, as to conciliate the favour of God, while we live in the violation or neglect of his commandments. By *nature* we mean nothing more than that law and order of things, which the Divine Wisdom established at the creation, and has uniformly adhered to ever since: so that when we affirm that it is *natural* for such and such effects to proceed from their correspondent causes, we only declare that such is the will of God. Now the same God hath eternally *willed*, and immutably decreed, that moral obedience shall be the only possible qualification for heavenly happiness. “Blessed are they
“that wash their garments, from the de-
“filements of vice, and do his command-
“ments, that they may have a right to the
“tree of Life, and enter in, through the
“gates, into the city.”

With this idea harmonises every page of the new testament. All its precepts, promises, and threatenings evidently tend to illustrate

SERM.
XVI.

illustrate and confirm this great doctrine; and to convince us of the indispensable necessity of habitual moral holiness; without which, we are assured, in so many words, no man shall see the LORD. It solemnly declares, that, in CHRIST JESUS, that is, in the religion which he has established, neither circumcision availeth any thing to make a man acceptable in the sight of God; nor yet uncircumcision; not any particular forms, ordinances, principles, profession, or persuasion of men, but such a faith only as worketh by love, or influences our conduct to the practice of universal righteousness. Not every one that saith unto him, LORD, LORD—acknowledges him for his SAVIOUR, and professeth the religion of the Gospel—shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he only that doeth the will of his Father who is in heaven. Is there here a single ray of hope for faith without works? “This is the will of GOD (says his Apostle) even your *sanctification*.” And therefore to all such as

are

are immoral in their life and conversation, SERM.
XVI.
though they have prophesied in his name, and in his name cast out devils, and in his name done many wondrous works, or miracles, he declares his final address shall be, I never knew ye, depart from me all ye workers of iniquity. And once, when he was informed that his mother and his brethren sought to speak with him, stretching out his hands to his *disciples*, “ behold “ (says he) my mother and my brethren ! “ for whosoever shall *do*”—still observe, I beseech you, all the emphasis is laid upon our doings—“ whosoever shall *do* the “ will of my Father, who is in heaven, the “ same is my brother, my sister, and my “ mother.” Plainly teaching that none should ever expect to become children of the adoption, and joint-heirs with him of eternal life, unless they recommended themselves to the favour of GOD by a conformity to his own Divine Attributes. And what was his declaration, when one of the company lift up his voice and said,
“ Blessed

SERM.
XVI.

“Blessed is the womb that bare thee,
“and the paps that thou hast sucked.”
“Rather blessed are they that hear the
“word of God and *keep it*.”

What ! can *any one* be more blessed than the mother of the Redeemer ? Yes, *every one*, who shall be her superior in holiness.

It is evident, therefore, that though *faith* in JESUS CHRIST may give us our *title* to heaven and immortal happiness ; yet that it is utterly impossible we should ever arrive at the possession, unless we co-operate with him, in that which is so expressly declared to be one great object of his mission, “that he might redeem us
“from all iniquity, and purify unto him-
“self a peculiar people, zealous of good
“works.” And does not his holy Apostle put a case of a man’s possessing every degree of faith—even all faith, so that he may remove mountains ; and yet, by being deficient in practical virtue, be finally lost, and reduced to nothing ?

CHRIST

CHRIST is not only our *Priest* to atone SERM. XVI. for, but he is our *Prophet* to instruct, and our *Prince* to govern us; and if we obstinately refuse to be taught, or, when taught, to obey, infinite mercy itself cannot save us. For surely the mercy of God must never be so explained as to diminish, or contradict, his inflexible justice, and immutable holiness.

The *righteous* only, the appointed Judge hath declared, shall go into life eternal. Well then, the whole controversy is reduced to one single question: who the righteous are? and this shall be answered by an infallible interpreter. "Little children (says the loving and beloved disciple) let no man deceive you." The abundant necessity of the caution appears from some doctrines of late years publicly maintained among us. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." Now these are decisive words; observe, it is not he that professeth, or intendeth to do; it is not he that barely believeth in, or relieth on,

SERM.
XVI.

on, the perfect righteousness of JESUS CHRIST; and still less is it he that trusteth to the righteousness of the saints; but he that now actually lives in the personal practice of moral and religious duties, and continually returns to them by effectual repentance. He that doeth righteousness, he and he only is the Christian righteous man; he, and none else, is accepted by God as righteous under the gospel. This is regeneration, sanctification, adoption, election, and relation to JESUS CHRIST.

“Whosoever is born of God sinneth not;
 “and as many as have the spirit of God
 “do mortify the deeds of the body; in
 “this the children of God are manifest,
 “and the children of the devil;—who so
 “doeth not righteousness is not of God:
 “give diligence, by your good works, to
 “make your calling and election sure; for
 “the righteous LORD loveth righteousness;
 “and they that are CHRIST’S have cruci-
 “fied the flesh, with the affections and
 “lusts thereof.”

Where

Where now is the Solifidian's, or Antihomian's hope? The reason of this is evident; by the eternal and unalterable constitution of things; by all that we apprehend of the divine essence and attributes—by all that we can infer from the nature of intelligent existence—from the state and condition in which we are placed—from the exigencies of life, and the equity, reason, and proportion of things; by all and every of these it appears that morality is indispensably necessary to the perfection and happiness of man.

SERM.
XVI.

And are not all our Redeemer's sermons, doctrines, discourses, and example a confirmation of it? To establish among us pure morality, justice, judgement, and mercy; and to convince us that all the positive institutions of religion are only means to this end, is professedly the aim of every one of them. And could we bring ourselves to suppose a possibility for any one to be admitted to the seats of blessedness, who has lived in habitual oppo-

SERM.
XVI.

fition to them ; to such an one even heaven itself would be no heaven at all. For if those sublime employments of admiring, imitating, adoring and glorifying God, which constitute its chief happiness, be now altogether alien, irksome, and unpleasant to us ; can we imagine that our souls and all their habits and affections can be so changed in a moment, as to acquire such a perception of, and relish for them, as will render us happy in them, and them alone, to all eternity ? no ; in the very presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore—even there, the immoral man would pine and languish, be confounded and distressed. Heaven has no objects to gratify the passions of the sensualist. Every thing he saw, and every thing he heard, would be an insufferable reproach to him. It is a great truth on which we should keep our eyes constantly fixed, that although our capacity for happiness shall be *perfected* in heaven ; yet must it, of necessity,

cessity, be *begun* here upon earth. The habits acquired in life will be confirmed by death. He that, at the close of this scene of probation, shall be found unjust shall be unjust still, and he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and, therefore, utterly incapable of heavenly happiness to all eternity. Corruption cannot inherit incorruption.

SERM.
XVI.

Think of this and tremble, thou self-deluded sinner! who intendest to rely on the hair-hung uncertainty of a death-bed repentance.

But I am engaged to demonstrate, in the second place, that as to purify ourselves from iniquity, and to live conformably to the will of God, is the only means of justification and eternal happiness; so is it (through the merits of a crucified Redeemer) a certain and infallible one; and that nothing but wilful self-delusion, invincible obstinacy, or unpardonable negligence, can hinder us from applying those means, and enjoying their blessed conse-

SERM.
XVI.

quence and effect. "Blessed are they
"that wash their garments, and do his
"commandments, that they may have
"power over the tree of life, and enter in,
"through the gates, into the city."

And in confirmation of this great and interesting doctrine, there is hardly a chapter in the new testament that does not afford us the plainest and most satisfactory evidence. These are the words of CHRIST himself; "God so loved the world that
"he gave his only begotten Son"—to atone for our past offenses—"that whoso-
"ever believeth in him—sheweth his belief by moral obedience—should not perish, but have everlasting life." Again; "they that follow me—tread in the steps
"of his holy and exemplary conduct—I
"give unto them eternal life, and they
"shall never perish, neither shall any
"pluck them out of my hand." Once more; "if thou wilt enter into life, keep
"the commandments." Here you see, that to *believe* in CHRIST—to *follow* him,
and

and to keep his commandments, all signify one and the same thing, namely, practical personal holiness. So his beloved Apostle, "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever; and this is his promise, that he hath promised us—in consequence of those doings, even eternal life."

"Being made free from sin (says St. Paul) —that is both actual and original—by repentance, and faith in a crucified SAVIOR—and become servants to God—sincere, though unworthy servants, ye have your fruit unto holiness," or bring forth holy fruit, and the end, everlasting life. And, therefore, every one who, like him, shall be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"—maintained it both in principle and practice (for you will observe that by *faith* is here evidently meant the whole system of Gospel duties) every Christian thus qualified is entitled to apply those most comfortable words to himself, "henceforth there is

SERM.

XVI.

“laid up for me a crown of righteousness,”
 —a very remarkable expression, and immediately to the present purpose—“which God, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” Because, he directly adds, he will give this crown of righteousness, or reward of justice and virtue, not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing; that is, who, by habitual compliance with gospel morality, have qualified themselves for the scrutiny of that day “when God will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing,” or, as he expresses it in a subsequent verse, “to every man who, by working good, seeketh for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.”

This is the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast; and though the heavens and all things beneath them shall perish, and wax old as doth a garment, and be changed as a vesture; yet this shall never fail or disappoint any one sincere humble Christian.

That

That Being who cannot deceive, Amen, SERM.
XVI
the faithful and true Witness, hath promised eternal life and happiness, through his son JESUS CHRIST, to those who conscientiously labour to keep his commandments.

And what an encouragement is this to our spiritual labors; that the success of them is absolutely certain, and altogether in our own power! I trust I shall not be understood as speaking exclusively of the grace of God; which alone enableth us either to will, or to do of his good pleasure. But since he hath been pleased, upon our earnest prayers for this necessary principle, and sincere intention to concur with it, to promise us all the necessary supplies; he may be affirmed to have already put the means and instruments of eternal happiness into our own hands. And it is to the highest degree absurd, not to say blasphemous, but to suppose that the God of infinite mercy and infallible truth should require any thing of us as the con-

SERM.
XVI.

dition of obtaining salvation, which he knows to be either impracticable by us, or incapable of producing the desired effect.

And now, brethren, ye see what is the hope of your calling. If ye knew and were convinced of these things before; what will ye alledge in your *excuse*?—for in your *defense* you will never be able to answer a word; why you are every day and every hour of your lives sacrificing this blessed hope to the riches, honors, and pleasures of the world? Can you deny, that you have, in a thousand instances, preferred gain to godliness—some little paltry, worldly profit in the way of business, to truth and justice—honor to honesty—the tinsel of dress to the wants of a naked and starving soul—pleasure to piety—an engagement with the world to your most sacred duty to God Almighty—and the notice and distinction of poor worms like yourselves, who have crawled an inch higher than you in the temple of Mammon, to the approbation of conscience,

and

and the applause of Angels. Uniformly, SERM.
XVI.
indefatigably, incessantly, have ye laboured
for the meat which perisheth; but for
that meat which endureth unto eternal life;
what have ye done? Can you think on
that awful period, pregnant with the ir-
reversible fate of millions and millions of
reasonable creatures—pretended candidates
for immortal happiness and professed be-
lievers in GOD and CHRIST—and not la-
ment, even with tears of blood, the ab-
solute nothingness of your preparation hi-
therto? O! consider, before it is too late,
how you will be able to bear that ago-
nising reproach of your impoverished inca-
pacitated souls: “What, could you not
“watch with me one hour?” I fear it
would distress some among us to show
when they actually bestowed even that
portion of time—one little hour—to make
their calling and election sure; by acquiring
such holy habits and dispositions as alone
can qualify us for the joys of heaven.

SERM.
XVI.

Is there any among us so sunk in the dregs of life—so infatuated by the love of riches—so stupified by the fumes of the world, as to hear, without immediate resolutions of repentance and amendment, those soul-transporting warnings of the approaching day, recorded in the divine book? “After these things, I heard
“a great voice of much people in heaven,
“saying hallelujah! salvation and glory,
“and honour and power unto the LORD
“our GOD; for true and righteous are his
“judgements.” And again, “I heard as
“it were the voice of a great multitude,
“and as the voice of many waters, and
“as the voice of mighty thunderings, say-
“ing, hallelujah! for the LORD GOD Om-
“nipotent reigneth! let us be glad and
“rejoice, and give honor unto him; for
“the marriage of the Lamb is come, and
“his wife hath made herself ready”—hath
acquired the necessary dispositions of soul;
“and to her was granted that she should
“be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;
“for the fine linen is the *righteousness* of
“the

“the saints”—their personal virtue and holiness. “Blessed are they who are called
“unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.
“These are the true sayings of God.”

SERM.
XVI.
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Have you, my deluded brethren, any secret fund of consolation in store, to support you under the consciousness of having neither part nor lot in this matter? To recompense you for the irretrievable loss of all that can satisfy the wish of reason—of every thing that can gratify the desires of an immortal soul?

Now, to God the Father, &c.

"the things"—their personal virtues and
 holiness. "Blessed are they who are called
 unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."
 "These are the true signs of God."
 Have you, my beloved brethren, any
 lesser kind of consolation in store to sup-
 port you under the consciousness of hav-
 ing neither part nor lot in this matter? For
 recompense you for the irretrievable loss of
 all that can satisfy the wish of reason—of
 every thing that can gratify the desire of
 an immortal soul?

Now, O God the Father, We

S E R M O N XVII.

THE DELUSIONS

OF

T H E H E A R T.

SERMON XVII

THE DELUSIONS

OF

THE HEART

S E R M O N XVII.

*He flattereth himself in his own eyes, until
his iniquity be found to be hateful,*

Pſalm xxxvi. 2.

WHEN we institute a comparison S E R M.
XVII.
between the morality of the Gospel, and the lives of its professors at the present day, the diversity, or rather *contradiction* is so glaring as to smite us at once with astonishment and horror. If there be any dependence on the dictates of conscience—if there be a word of truth in religion, the habitual practice of virtue is absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation. And yet it is a solemn matter of fact, to be deplored, even with tears of blood, that the generality of Christians

SERM.
XVII.

are seldom to be found any further virtuous, faithful, honest, or true, than is consistent with the indulgence of their passions, and their worldly interests. How shall we account for this? Shall we attribute it to *hypocrisy*? and say, that they do not believe in their hearts a single word of what they profess with their mouths? Shall we resolve it into a partial disorder of the *understanding*? and suppose they have deliberately settled it in their minds that the pleasures of this world are preferable to those of eternity? Or imagine, with some, that the absurd and impious doctrine of *faith without works* has been the source of these monstrous evils? No doubt, but in a great variety of cases, the wickedness of individuals may be referred to one or other of these originals; but still a principle of more *general* and *extensive* influence must be discovered before we shall be able to assign any cause adequate to that epidemical licentiousness, to that almost universal inattention to moral rectitude.

tude every where so visible in the pursuit of pleasure, the transaction of business, and the conduct of life. It is not ignorance of their duty; it is not deliberate infidelity; it is not *a settled resolution* to sacrifice the hopes of a blessed immortality to the transitory gratifications of life; and still less can it be attributed to the extravagant doctrines of modern enthusiasm, because they have been a thousand times proved to be as shocking to all our natural notions of God and his attributes as great an affront to reason and common sense as they are to revelation.

How happens it then that rational creatures, who know and are convinced of the judgement of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of eternal death—nevertheless have brought themselves to continue in the practice of them? It is demonstrably owing to that great and pregnant principle of self-love; so predominant in the hearts of all men; one of whose necessary properties it is (wherever

SERM.
XVII.

it has been unreasonably indulged) to pass an illusion upon the judgement, and make us view every action of our own in a light infinitely too favourable; to approve where we should condemn; or, if that be impossible, as in the more notorious violations of duty, still to discover, or imagine we discover many *extenuating* circumstances, which almost annihilate the horror of their turpitude, and the apprehension of divine vengeance.

And this I apprehend to be the sentiment of holy David, in the words of my text; “the wicked man flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful”—or, as it may be translated, *when his iniquity should be found to be hateful*. That is, instead of pronouncing his sins to be odious and abominable, when conscience sets them in array before him, he contrives and invents such a variety of excuses and palliations for them, as to flatter himself into a general approbation of his own conduct. Hence
it

it is that while good men contemplate his situation with horror and amazement, and hardly regard him as any other than a vessel of wrath, sealed up to inexorable vengeance, he himself seems utterly insensible of his enormities, and proceeds through life with as much tranquillity and unconcern as if he were really in the right way. From these principles, some account may be given of that astonishing and horrible phenomenon—the *mirth of a profligate*. We need search no further to verify the prophet's observation—"the heart is deceitful above all things."

SERM.
XVII.

And this being a general infirmity incident to all the children of Adam, and more or less infecting even the wisest and best of men, I trust you will favour me with your attention, while I endeavour to examine to the bottom of those illusions which our heart is so apt to put upon our conscience, in forming a judgement of our moral and religious state.

SERM.
XVII.

The *first* and principal consists in sup-
posing our deviations from duty neither so
great, or so frequent as they really are.

The *second*, when we are *compelled* to
see them in their genuine turpitude, and
native horror, in taking it for granted, that
the circumstances of the *temptation* were
such that it was next to impossible for us
to *resist*, and hold fast our integrity; and
consequently that we are *excusable* on that
account.

The examination of these shall consti-
tute the topicks of my following discourse.
And God grant that every one here pre-
sent may avail himself of this opportunity
to search and try out his ways, and turn
again unto the LORD of Hosts!

As to the first of these, whoever has
been used to commune with his own heart,
will confess that he has always found his
iniquities divested of half their horror,
when they passed in review before his con-
science,

science, by this consideration—that they were *common*; that is, such as thousands besides himself are guilty of every day. Hence the *shame* of a vile action, which God and Nature intended for our preservative at first, or our restorative afterwards, insensibly loses its influence on him, and he contrives to keep himself in countenance by *custom*, though severely reproached by law. Carry this observation with you into the busy scenes of life, and you will find it exemplified every hour by the followers of ambition, the votaries of pleasure, and the drudges of profit and gain.

SERM.
XVII.

This delusion introduces another, if possible, still more infatuating and fatal in its consequences: in proportion as our sense of shame is effaced will be the repetition of our crimes. Now nothing so radically destroys our natural horror and detestation of sin as our familiarity with it. Though every man will, at *first*, find himself scared at its monstrous deformity, yet this

SERM.
XVII.

insensibly wears off upon longer and more intimate acquaintance; till, at length, his moral sense being corrupted, or, perhaps, totally obliterated, vice and virtue present themselves before him, without raising any emotion suitable to their several natures. The latter has no form or comeliness that he should love it, the former nothing abominable or terrifying that he should hate it. Nay, from making a mock at sin, he brings himself, at last, to regard it, not merely as harmless and innocent, but as the means and instrument of gratifying his predominant passions; and then, "Evil be thou my good" is the superscription or maxim of his heart.

Have we not instances every day of men being detected in the practice of fraud, forgery, and falsehood, in the transaction of business, convicted of taking away by violence the property, nay the lives of their fellow-creatures, who, at the very bar of judgement, and place of execution, have discovered neither confusion nor remorse

morfe, but that their villainies had failed of success. “ Were they ashamed that they
“ had committed abomination? Nay,
“ they were not ashamed, neither did they
“ blush.” The candle of the LORD is
extinguished within them. They were
sorry, not for their sin, but that they could
sin no longer. Such are the fatal effects
of habit; a profligate contempt of guilt
and shame.

SERM.
XVII.

Another cause of delusion is this; when
once men have persuaded themselves that
half the world are guilty of the same, or
as great crimes as they are, and are besides
used to regard their own sins with a degree
of complacency, they presently advance
one step further, and argue and conclude
that it is impossible God should sentence to
eternal damnation so many millions of his
creatures for infirmities which they assert,
and, perhaps, believe to be inseparable from
human nature. And *this* terror of the
LORD once removed—the fearful looking-
for of judgement and fiery indignation—

SERM.
XVII.

we can never expect to persuade men to stop in the burning pursuit of their lust, their avarice, or revenge, coolly to contemplate the detestable nature of their sins.

But, good God! what miserable subterfuges and self-delusions are these. Do we require further proof that every wicked man is a fool? Not to mention Christianity, is there a heathen country—is there a kingdom of barbarians upon the face of the earth, where rational creatures imagine they may substitute *custom* for the eternal rule of right? Suppose yourself summoned before the judge on a charge of murder, could you possibly think to justify yourself by coolly pleading that you are certain murders have now been committed for many centuries of years, and probably will be so to the end of the world. Would this be an apology or an insult? Nay, remember that *we* must approve our conduct to the great God of heaven and earth, who is himself the injured party in every transgression against virtue and honesty. Over
and

and above our natural duty to him, as our Creator and Father, we have solemnly sworn allegiance to him, and obedience to his holy laws, by our baptismal covenant, and have, perhaps, received the sacrament upon it a hundred times. However, finding, or fancying we had found, a set of abandoned creatures in open rebellion against God, his attributes, and ordinances, we have ventured to lift under their banner, if not defying the thunder and lightning of divine vengeance, yet hoping to escape in the midst of the croud.

SERM.
XVII.

Now, this is the best of your plea for wilful perjury and treason against the dreadful Majesty of Heaven. You have heard, no doubt, that God has commanded you not to be conformed to this world—not to follow the multitude to do evil; and yet you have presumed, in a case involving the happiness of your soul and body, and that to all eternity, not only to conform yourself to the world, and to follow the multitude to do evil; but even

to

SERM.
X II.

to set up custom against scripture, and to make the practices of the vilest of sinners of greater authority than the will of God. As if sins were only damnable because they were singular; or great and crying sins sure to escape on account of their magnitude and clamour: that is, in one word, that two or three wicked men may draw down the fiercest judgements of God; but a whole kingdom of abomination may be an object, if not of complacency, yet of mercy and forgiveness.

Need I add any thing more to expose the ineffable, complicated foolishness, horror, and blasphemy of their principles, who contrive to keep themselves easy in the habitual practice of fraud and falsehood, in the transaction of business, of impurity and dishonour in the pursuit of pleasure, only by alledging that there are thousands besides themselves daily and hourly guilty of the same?

The laws of God are eternal and immutable, and the observance of them the bounden

bounden indispensable duty of every rational creature; so that if any thing can be inferred from the reflexion, that there are numbers of abandoned infatuated wretches who dare transgress, it is only this—so much stronger is the obligation incumbent on me to distinguish myself by my zeal for the divine honour and glory: always remembering that most awful declaration, “though *band join in band*, the “wicked shall not go unpunished.”

And was not this verified, in a manner the most affecting imagination can conceive, in the destruction of *Sodom*? where, if there had been found but ten righteous men only, the city had been saved. Whenever therefore the deceitful heart of the sinner shall endeavour to pacify him by this plea, if I am to be cast off, utterly abandoned, and finally ruined only for such or such an indulgence, what must become of the rest of the world? Let him think on that prodigious moment when the whole race of mankind was swept away at once by an avenging

SERM.

XVII.

avenging deluge, and he may yet be safe.
Numbers are no protection against Omnipotence.

Is it supposed that you are sinners above all that dwell upon the face of the earth? I tell you nay; nevertheless except ye repent, ye shall all inevitably perish. "Let every man prove his *own* work," (says the Apostle) examine and correct, by the sole rule of God's word—and not by the evil examples of others—the state of his soul; "and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burthen. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

It remains that I now consider the last general apology, which is so frequently in the mouth or heart of the licentious and immoral, when he should pass judgement on his bosom sin—taken from the weakness of human nature, and the strength of temptation.

But

But what must such a man think of himself, if it should be proved after all, that this very plea, which he depends on for pardon and excuse, is not only an *aggravation* of every other sin, but, thus generally urged, for repeated habitual indulgence, is itself a most abominable sin, as well as blasphemous error. Resolve it into its constituent principles, and it will be found to imply a reproach both on the author of our being, and of his providence in the government of the world. For whether we suppose ourselves to be formed of such a nature as to be incapable of resistance, or placed in a situation, where resistance is vain, we equally arraign the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God; nay, we ultimately make him the cause and original of sin. But this notion is altogether as unreasonable and absurd as it is wicked. Can the fountain of all good, think you, be the contriver and parent of evil? Can infinite wisdom and power be the author of a system which must neces-

SERM.
XVII.

farily and unavoidably thwart, contradict, and oppose every attribute and perfection of his own nature? "If (as the Apostle unanswerably argues) "every *good* gift, and every " *perfect* gift be from above, and cometh " down from the Father of Lights, with " whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning ;" then let no man from henceforth presume to say, or imagine, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, who hath formed me of such a nature, or placed me in such a situation: for as the purity and excellence of the divine essence is such that it is impossible for God himself to be tempted with evil, so neither doth or can he tempt any man. What then is the original of evil? In one word, our own wilful abuse of our free agency; or, as the same Apostle expresses it, " every " man is tempted and enticed when he is " drawn away of his own lust; and when " lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth " sin." Whatever aggravations or extenuations of sin may arise from natural, accidental,

cidental, or external circumstances, yet
sin itself—the nature and essence of sin—
consists entirely in the choice of a man's
own will; and his guilt is always just so
much in proportion as his choice deviates
from the dictates of his reason and know-
ledge of his duty. “Lo! this only have
“I found (says the wise king) that God
“created man upright, but they have
“sought out many evil inventions.”

SERM.
XVII.

Besides that our temptations to sin were
and are *irresistible* every man knows to be
false in fact. Otherwise, how comes it to
pass that other motives are oftentimes
found effectually to preserve us, unharmed,
from the most violent assault, when the
shield of faith, the breast-plate of righteous-
ness, and the helmet of salvation have been
opposed in vain? The confirmed, sordid
miser can resist the most pressing temptation
to impurity, when he imagines it may
affect his fortune or his health. The brutal
glutton, or drunkard, will be *honest*, if con-
vinced that the reputation of honesty will
the

SERM.
XVII.

the more easily admit him to a social debauch. Nay, even that composition of absurdity and wickedness, the modern man of honour, has been sometimes known to spare the innocence of the wife or daughter of his friend, and withhold his hand from the murder of himself or neighbour, merely from considering that the manner of it may, perhaps, be voted infamous by wretches like himself; and yet the riches of eternity, the health and salvation of an immortal soul—the pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore, and the loudest applauses of angels and arch-angels are continually slighted, neglected, and forfeited for ever, in the pursuit of lust, fraud, and revenge. They first wilfully and deliberately withdraw themselves from the influence of the divine grace—make a practice of turning their backs on the public worship of their God and SAVIOR—industriously stupify their conscience, that they may have no interruption in their pleasures; and when they have thoroughly
rivetted

rivetted their whole soul and affections down to earth, and superinduced an unnatural bias to evil, they impiously presume to say, "it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;" though, perhaps, every honest, impartial examiner plainly discovers the source of sin in the *acquired depravity of their own hearts*. Yes! the principles that utterly enslave, infatuate, and destroy us, are never original and innate; but evidently and demonstrably either adventitious and adopted, or such as derive their *energy*, if not their existence, entirely from ourselves.

SERM.
XVII.

And can it now be thought that the weakness of our nature, and the strength of temptation will serve as a sufficient apology? This is more than self-flattery—it is wilful infatuation—it is delusion and madness, the result of painful sophistry and falsehood. You have mistaken habit for nature, the corruptions of will for the imbecillity of reason, and the operations of

SERM.
XVII.the devil and your own lusts for the work
of God.

But let your imagination conduct you to that scene, which awaits us all; when *eternity* shall present itself to our cool, awakened thoughts, hell be naked before us, and destruction have no covering, when the world and all things in it shall be slipping away from your trembling grasp; are you content to depend upon this plea in the hour of death? or take it in your hand to the bar of judgement, when your God shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire; will you then venture to rely on it for your justification? You will be told that all that was really *weak* in your nature might have been strengthened by the grace of God. That this all-sufficient grace had been a thousand times freely offered to you by the ministration of the gospel of JESUS CHRIST, and as often impiously rejected. That there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; that

that you were never suffered to be tempted above what, with the assistance of that grace, you might have resisted—that with the temptation a way was always made for your escape, that you might be able to bear it; and yet, that you indolently, or wilfully, submitted to it, merely to procure some temporal profit, gratification, or indulgence. Nay, to sum up all the complicated charge against you, though repeatedly, continually assured, that nothing but timely repentance, ample restitution, and perfect amendment of life could purge away the filth of your sin, through faith in CHRIST JESUS, you have dared to die, and come to judgement, relying on uncovenanted mercies, and certain chimerical notions of pardon, contrary to the plainest dictates of reason and conscience, and the express testimony of GOD and your SAVIOUR.

Where now is your boasted plea and apology? Does your heart fail you through

SERM.
XVII.

— fear of the tremendous sentence, which you have deserved? O, avert it then, my brethren, and fellow-Christians! avert it by every holy resolution, every act of contrition, and an immediate entrance on a better course, regulated, not by the example and practices of a corrupted world, but by the revealed will of God. Break off your sins by instant righteousness. The eternal welfare of your souls and bodies is at stake: suffer not, therefore, your eyes to sleep, nor your eye-lids to slumber, neither the temples of your head to take any rest, till every dangerous delusion of self-love, every unreasonable suggestion of self-complacency, is banished from your bosom. You are now awake, and in your senses; examine carefully and sincerely your spiritual state and condition. Fear not to contemplate your crimes in all their genuine horror. And may you so avail yourselves of the blessed opportunities of life, health, and grace, which are still before

The Delusions of the Heart.

85

fore you, that you may effectually re-
pent, and be converted, and your sins
blotted out for ever, by the blood of
JESUS CHRIST, when the times for re-
freshing shall come from the presence of
the LORD.

SERM.
XVII.
}

Now, to GOD the Father, &c.

...and you may find that you have
been converted and your life
changed for ever. In the blood of
Jesus Christ, when the times for re-
freshing shall come from the presence of
the Lord.

Yes, I can do it.

421

S E R M O N XVIII.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES;

BY THE

EXAMPLE OF JOSEPH.

SE R M O N XVIII



FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES;

LEAMINGTON JOSEPH

S E R M O N XVIII.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, come near to me, I pray you; and they came near: and he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you, to preserve life.

Genesis, xlv. 4 & 5.

THE examples of great and illustrious personages, who were eminent for supernatural degrees of moral goodness, and for the purity, strength, and sublimity of their virtues, have, in all ages of the world, been held in the highest veneration. And it has been thought of considerable service

SERM.
XVIII.

SERM.
XVIII.

service to the cause of virtue, as well as a respect due to the memories of those who have excelled in it; to *propose* such uncommon, such noble, and useful characters, as a proper pattern for the imitation of all who are studious of the improvement and perfection of their nature. And for this there is an obvious foundation in *reason*, and in the very frame and constitution of man. For universal experience will attest that the influence of good *examples* is much more extensive, vigorous, and permanent than *that* of the wisest precepts, or the most forcible and accurate reasonings. *They* not only instruct without alarming that pride, and self-sufficiency which are the great enemies to moral and religious improvement, but effectually persuade. They excite admiration, animate perseverance, work upon the native sense of ingenuity, and inspire the noblest resolutions of exalted and divine accomplishments.

Were

Were we to contemplate the most elaborate exhibition of moral excellence in speculation only, we should be ready enough, perhaps, to acknowledge the exquisite beauties of the picture, the harmony of its tints, and the grace of its proportions, but might think, at the same time, it is wrought up to a romantick strain, and too sublime to be copied into life. Whereas, when we see it, as it were, *substantiated* and *realised* before us, and are fully convinced that it has actually existed in living characters, the ground of our despondency and inaction is entirely removed; a noble emulation is inspired, and we are not only excited, but *encouraged* to excel.

The example to which the text alludes is, perhaps, one of the most amiable and affecting instances of a generous nature exerted in the forgiveness of injuries, that is supplied by the universal history of mankind—an example adapted to all ranks and stations of human life, and which may be profitably studied by every generation of men;

SERM.
XVIII.

men ; but which is more peculiarly necessary to be proposed and insisted on, at the present day, when, by the absurdest tyranny of custom, and the contemptible flagitious maxims of modern honour, revenge is constituted greatness of mind, and a bloody prosecution of *imaginary injuries* the criterion of a great and generous spirit.

To demonstrate that the principles of the duellist are a palpable contradiction to justice, reason, decency, and common sense ;—that they are an impious defiance of the laws of God and man, and as despicably foolish as they are arrogantly wicked, has not yet been found sufficient to discountenance the custom. It is impossible by reason and argument to prevail on men to renounce inveterate errors, either in principle or practice, which they adopted without examination, and which, as they flatter their lusts, pride, prejudice, and passion, will be favourably heard, and implicitly obeyed ; while truth, justice, equity,

equity, and benevolence solicit their attention in vain. All that remains, therefore, for the Christian moralist is to set the examples of a contrary nature in the strongest point of view, and to leave every man to decide on their comparative excellence; referring them to that omnipotent grace of God, which is able, of the *very stones*, (as the Baptist expresses it) even out of the most obdurate and abandoned spirits, to raise up children to righteousness.

With this benevolent design, I beg leave to recommend to your consideration a circumstance in the history of the amiable and excellent *Joseph*; which, at the same time as it supplies us with one of the most necessary lessons, is, perhaps, the severest reproof of the present principles and temper of mankind that can be found in the sacred writings.

You will be pleased to recollect that *Joseph* happening to be the favourite son of an aged parent, was, on that account, envied and hated by all his brethren. In the

SERM.
XVIII.

the simplicity of guileless innocence, it seems, he had communicated to them two of his *dreams*; which, as they were evidently prophetick of his future prosperity, and of *their* humble submission to him in some distant period; they vindictively conspired to defeat them, even at the expence of his life. An opportunity soon offered, which demonstrated their invincible malice. His brethren being appointed to transact some business of their father's, in a remote part of the country; the good old man, ever solicitous for their welfare, despatches the unsuspecting youth, to see "whether it were well with them, and "with their flocks, and to bring him "word." One might have thought the benevolence of his errand would have softened their hearts, and diverted them from their cruel and wicked purpose. But the text expressly assures us that when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. "And they said one to another,

“ behold this *dreamer* cometh.” He ap-
proached them with all the good-nature of
youthful innocence; though weary and fa-
tigated by wandering about in the fields in
search of them, till his tender strength
was nearly exhausted. Their first resolu-
tion was to murder him immediately, and
cast him into a pit, and say some evil beast
hath devoured him.

SERM.
XVIII.

You see, therefore, their malice was *se-
date and deliberate*. They contrived as well
for their own *security*, as the destruction
of their poor brother. Nay, they were so
far lost to all the emotions of pity, as to
aggravate his sufferings by insult and re-
proach:—“ we shall see, say they, what
“ will become of his *dreams*.” His bro-
ther Reuben, however, relented; touched
with compassion, he kindly interceded for
his life. But the mildest sentence all his
intreaties, and the tears and prayers of the
poor helpless innocent could procure for
him, was to strip him of his coat of many
colours, by which his father’s tenderness
had

SERM.
XVIII.

had distinguished him, and to cast him into a *pit*; where they intended to abandon him till he should break his heart with sorrow, and miserably perish with hunger and thirst.

While they were *feasting* themselves, after this unmanly and merciless exploit, as it were, triumphing in the defeat and extinction of all his hopes, and their own fears of his future superiority; they were interrupted by the arrival of a company of Ishmaelitish merchants, who happened to take that road, in their journey towards Egypt. This again induced them to change his sentence from death to another, which to many ingenuous spirits is less eligible than even death itself—perpetual slavery. They immediately sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, who carried him away captive, far from his indulgent sorrowing parent, into a strange and remote country; where he was obliged to submit to all the complicated indignities, injuries, and hardships, incident

dent to a state of bondage, and helpless, hopeless poverty.

S E R M.
XVIII.

I may now venture to call upon any man on the face of the whole earth to declare, whether, with all the partiality of self-love about him, he can possibly bring himself to believe he ever sustained so deep an injury from a fellow-creature as this?—Robbed of the protection of his father, a father too, who doated on him with all the inexpressible meltings of paternal affection—deprived by one cruel stroke of friends, relations, country, fortune, and liberty—degraded to the state of a slave—the authority they usurped over him carrying with it the severest implication of his guilt; at the very time too when his soul was replete with tenderness and brotherly love towards them, and his poor feeble body fainted under the act of expressing it:—Let, I say, the modern man of honour reflect a moment on the accumulated injury, and when he feels the fury of his own indignation, and the customs of

SERMON
XVIII.

a corrupted world; urging him to personal revenge, let him turn his eyes towards the conduct of Joseph, in the subsequent scenes of his life; and if his moral sense be not entirely obliterated, he will immediately see and acknowledge that the genuine dignity of human nature is never so gloriously exhibited, as in patience under oppression, and a generous pardon of the oppressor.

It would lead me too far to investigate the several steps by which the providence of God conducted him from the prison to the palace—his elegance of sentiment and honourable conduct with respect to his master's wife—his exaltation from the state of a slave to that of First Minister of Pharaoh King of Egypt; that the accomplished youth might (as the Psalmist speaks) “inform his princes after his will, and teach his senators wisdom.”

While he enjoyed this elevated station; in the very plenitude of his authority; for his wisdom, integrity, and success, beloved and almost adored both by prince and people,

ple, a singular train of accidents brought every one of his malicious persecutors into his immediate power.

SERM.
XVIII.

His brethren, and, indeed, the whole country of Canaan where they lived, were in danger of perishing by that very death, which they had designed for him. “The *famine* was sore in the land.” In this distress the good old patriarch dispatched his sons into Egypt to purchase *provisions*; where he had been informed all the necessities of life abounded.

Accordingly, the sons of Israel came to Joseph the Governour, and they bowed themselves before him with their faces to the earth. What an astonishing reverse of fortune is here! Those very men, who but a few years before had assumed the power of life and death over their brother, condemned him to the pit—sold him for a slave; despised, derided, and insulted his helpless innocence, are now standing before him, oppressed with awful apprehensions of his dignity and authority.

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Such

SERM.
XVIII.

Such incidents may serve to convince us that it is as foolish as it is wicked and unmanly to trample on our defenceless inferiors, and oppress the *poor*, merely from the persuasion that our superiour rank, riches, or power have placed us out of their reach.

Joseph immediately recollected his brethren, although difference of dress, language, and years, effectually concealed him from them. Now, therefore, it was his *turn* to retaliate—according to the language of the present times, to vindicate his injured honour, demand satisfaction, and chastise every one who had dared to insult and degrade him.

And he did it in a manner that cannot fail to affect every unprejudiced heart, and diffuse a ray of divine glory round human nature itself. He could refrain himself no longer—"and he cried, cause every man
"to go out from me, and he wept aloud,
"and said unto his brethren, I am *Joseph*!
"Doth my father yet live?"

So

So unexpected—so surprising a discovery must open every avenue of fear, shame, and remorse. Conscious guilt had already extorted from them a unanimous confession, “we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.” Well, therefore, might they now be overwhelmed with apprehensions of his immediate resentment. We are told, “they could not answer him, for they were troubled, or so confused, at his presence.” The generous creature observed it with the deepest concern; and did not hesitate a moment to assure them, that he pardoned and forgave them all from the bottom of his soul. He could not be happy—he was distressed, till he had even invented an apology for their conduct, and reconciled them to themselves: “and Joseph said unto his brethren, come near to me, I pray you; and they came near. And he said, I am Joseph, your brother,

SERM.
X. III.

“ther, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now
“therefore be not grieved, nor angry with
“yourselves that ye sold me hither: for
“God did send me before you to preserve
“life—to save your lives—by a great de-
“liverance.”

Instead of aggravating their merciless treatment of him, and dwelling on the circumstances of their baseness and cruelty, he ascribes the whole to the secret interposition of Divine Providence: “it was
“not you that sent me hither, but God.” He reminds them, that but for his residence and power in Egypt, they, their children, and aged parent might have miserably perished for want of the necessaries of life. He never once alludes to his past sufferings; and so far from endeavouring to revenge himself, it is evident that his whole solicitude was to comfort and relieve them, and to convince them of the sincerity of his reconciliation.

Generous, exalted, Godlike character!
With ineffable tenderness, “he fell on his
“brother

“brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept. SERM.
XVIII.
“Moreover, he kissed all his brethren, and
“wept over them.”

Is it in human nature to contemplate such a picture unmoved? I hope not. There is certainly something more edifying and affecting in this example of benevolence—something better calculated to reform and instruct the heart—to show the destructive consequences, the despicable turpitude and meanness of every exertion of private revenge, than the most perfect and elaborate system of ethics can possibly exhibit. Speak, ye, who best can tell—spirits of refined and genuine honour, who have felt the inexpressive meltings of virtuous friendship and brotherly love; who have exalted and ennobled your souls by a generous forgiveness of injuries; would you exchange the thrilling satisfaction for all the applause which a deluded world ever bestowed on the bloody exploits of heroism and vengeance? What are the plaudits of universal creation to a man, who

SER.M.
XVIII.

stands condemned by the law of his own nature? His own reason ratifying the verdict, and his conscience incessantly upbraiding and tormenting him?

Joseph's philanthropy, by the native impulse of his soul, anticipated one of the most refined duties of gospel righteousness: "Love your enemies (says the divine restorer of human nature) bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and despitefully use you, and persecute you, that you may be the children of your father, which is in heaven," or exalted to a resemblance of *uncreated* excellence. So likewise the great Apostle; "Recompence to no man evil for evil. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath"—rather submit to an injury than offer one. "For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the LORD. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing

by the Example of Joseph.

105
SERM.
XVIII.

“doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on
“his head,”—or melt down his iron heart
to an holier and happier temper.—“Be not
“overcome of evil, but overcome evil
“with good.”

And if there be a rational creature
among us, who can really censure all this,
as the indication of a mean and groveling
spirit; let him be told that the light
within him is darkness—his moral sense
is perverted, and he has ignorantly and
impiously exalted, in his own mind, the
attributes of the devil “above all that is
“called good.” And if such men are
qualified to take the lead in the customs
of the world, and prescribe rules of con-
duct to their fellow-creatures; then im-
piety, madness, absurdity, and ignorance
are the best schools of politeness and in-
struction. But I have done with the
duellist and modern man of honour.

Indulge me in a word or two more on
the history, and I conclude. After the

SERM.
XVIII.

death of Jacob their father, Joseph's brethren, still conscious of their crimes, were again apprehensive of his resentment. No art can ever separate fear from guilt. They knew his *filial* piety was as eminent as his other virtues; and therefore concluded he only deferred their punishment till he had done *rocking the cradle of declining age*, and could gratify his vengeance without disturbing the repose of his venerable parent. "They said among themselves, now our father is dead, Joseph will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." Under the influence of these apprehensions, they addressed themselves to him in the humblest strain of supplication: "Forgive, we pray thee, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin: for they did evil unto thee. And now we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." But the event will prove that their fears were utterly groundless. The truly great and

and good man, so far from indulging a single sentiment of revenge, was affected with unspeakable distress, to see that any such apprehensions still preyed upon their spirits. It is recorded that he wept sore when they thus spake unto him. He renewed, therefore, in the fullest terms all his former vows of sincere reconciliation, affection, and love. "Fear not," says he, in the most tender and pathetick language, "I will nourish you and your little ones." "And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto their hearts."

And thus he proceeded in the uninterrupted communication of blessings to them and their children, and their children's children, whom he brought up upon his own knees, to the last moment of his life; when in the hundred-and-tenth year of his age, crowned with wisdom, glory, and honour, he exchanged this world for a better.

If the charities of life be worth preserving—if there be any comfort in the dearest

SERM.
XVIII.

dearest connexions of father, brother, son, if any dignity in friendship, or any wisdom in cultivating that spirit of benevolence, which alone can render us happy either here, or to all eternity; think on the unspeakable foolishness of those principles, which have annexed the idea of *honour* to a temper of mind evidently and utterly destructive of all.

Brethren, and fellow-Christians! whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning. And may the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded, one towards another, according to CHRIST JESUS; that ye may with one mind, and one mouth, glorify GOD, even the Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. With whose own solemn and affecting words, I shall close up all:

“So likewise shall my Heavenly Father
“do also unto you,”—even *all* that omnipotent vengeance can inflict—“if ye, from
“your

“ your hearts, *forgive* not every one his
“ brother their trespasses.”

SERM.
XVIII.

Now to that high and holy one that inhabiteth eternity, in whose hands alone are the issues of life and death, be universal obedience, honour, glory, and fear, for ever and ever. Amen.

XXVII

"Your hearts, I give you every one his
brother their respective"

Now to that high and holy one that is
habited eternally in whole hands alone are
the lights of life and death, be universal
obedience, honour, glory, and love for
ever and ever. Amen.

in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

S E R M O N X I X .

S A N C T I F Y A F A S T .

A

S E R M O N F O R L E N T .

SERMON XIX

SANCTIFY FAST

SERMON FOR LENT

1/1

S E R M O N X I X .

*Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast,
call a solemn assembly.*

*Gather the people, sanctify the congregation;
assemble the elders: gather the children,
and those that suck the breasts. Let the
bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and
the bride out of her closet.*

*Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,
weep between the porch and the altar, and
let them say, spare thy people, O Lord!
and give not thine heritage to reproach,
that the heathen should rule over them,
wherefore should they say among the
people—where is their God? Then will
the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity
his people.—Joel, ii. 15, 16, 17, & 18.*

TH E R E is a sublime *pathos* running S E R M.
XIX.
through the writings of this prophet, }
every way worthy of the zeal with which
V O L . II . I he

SERM.
XIX.

he was actuated for the glory of God, a generous love of his country, and the exalted character which he sustained of an ambassador from heaven. He was divinely commissioned to arraign and reprove the prevailing wickedness and vices of the age in which he lived, and to point out the dreadful, complicated punishment which, by the special appointment of Providence, was then hanging over their heads, and ready to fall, with horrible destruction, on their devoted kingdom.

There is something irresistibly affecting, even at this remote distance of time, both in the manner and matter of his solemn denunciation. “Hear this, ye old men, and give ear all ye inhabitants of the land! awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl all ye drinkers of wine. Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests, howl ye ministers of the altar, come lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my

“ my GOD.” And again; “ Blow ye the
“ trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in
“ my holy mountain; let all the inhabi-
“ tants of the land tremble. For the day
“ of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at
“ hand.”

SERM.

XIX.

Having, by this solemn and alarming address, engaged the attention of his countrymen; he, by a most animated *prophœtia*, represents *plague, pestilence, and famine* just entering their city in battle-array, as the armies of the Living GOD, to take vengeance on their national enormities. “ The earth shall quake before them,
“ the heavens shall tremble; the sun and
“ the moon shall be dark, and the stars
“ shall withdraw their shining. And the
“ LORD shall utter his voice before his
“ army, for his camp is very great—for
“ he is strong that executeth his word,
“ for the day of the LORD is great, and
“ very terrible, and who can abide it?”

It is not in human nature, however stupefied by habitual impurity, to hear this,

SERM.

XIX.

without reflecting on their personal and national sins, which had thus provoked Omnipotence to destroy them. “When the judgements of the LORD are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof will learn righteousness”—will read their sin in their punishment.

Their consciences thus awakened, like a giant refreshed with wine—unutterable confusion, distress, and despair were visible in every countenance. They had sinned beyond the possibility of pardon. Nothing—nothing less than a *gospel* revelation of the Divine Nature could impart a single ray of hope in their present deplorable situation. “The soul that sinneth, it shall *die*,” were the hard terms of the law; and since their crimes were notorious, the sentence was inevitable. No; saith the Father of Mercy and Love, by the mouth of his prophet, or rather apostle of our LORD JESUS CHRIST—for it was an anticipated declaration of the second covenant—“Turn ye even to me with all

“your heart, and with fasting, and with
“weeping, and with mourning. And
“rend your *heart*, and not your garments,
“and turn unto the LORD your God; for
“he is still gracious and merciful, slow to
“anger, and of great kindness, and *re-*
“*penteth* him of the evil,”—is utterly un-
willing to inflict those dire calamities de-
nounced against you; if you may, by *any*
means, be induced to amend your lives, and
avert the impending judgement.

Such a man the prophet, with trem-
bling solicitude, immediately points out,
in the awful words of my text: “Blow
“the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast,
“call a solemn assembly. Gather the
“people, sanctify the congregation, assem-
“ble the elders. Gather the children, and
“those that suck the breasts; let the
“bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and
“the bride out of her closet. Let the
“priests, the ministers of the LORD,
“weep between the porch and the altar,
“and let them say, spare thy people, O

SERM.
XIX.

“ LORD! and give not thine heritage to
“ reproach, that the heathen should reign
“ over them; wherefore should they say
“ among the people—where is their God?
“ Then will the LORD be jealous for his
“ land, and pity his people.”

Mere uninstructed reason will suggest to us, that the all-wise and all-powerful Creator of the world can and must govern and preside over it. And as he is every where present, and actually sees and knows all things, and is infinitely able to determine all events according to his own will; it is an absurdity too gross for common-sense to suppose him an indifferent and unconcerned spectator of them. Now we are not more certain of his existence, than we are that he delights in virtue; we must, therefore, necessarily conclude, that in his government of the world, all due regard is had to the support and encouragement of that which he delights in, and consequently to the punishment of vice, which

which is an evident contradiction to his nature and attributes. SERM.
XIX.

These conclusions of reason are explained, strengthened, and supported by revelation. The old testament is little more than a history of Divine Providence, in which the cause and effect are equally visible. And in the *new*—that full and final revelation of the counsel of God—we are assured that his Providence is co-extensive with his creation, and that not even “a sparrow falleth to the ground” without our heavenly Father. Yea, “that the very hairs of our head are all “numbered.”

Upon this principle it is—the denial of which is but a concealed species of Epicurean atheism—that the church hath, from the very infancy of Christianity, appointed this solemn season of *Lent*: that since our great exemplar CHRIST JESUS did, for our sakes, fast 40 days and 40 nights; we may be prevailed on to use such abstinence that our flesh being subdued to

SERM.
XIX.

the spirit, we may learn to obey his godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, and save ourselves from the dreadful consequences of unrepented sin. In order therefore, to persuade all who hear me this day conscientiously to avail themselves of the spiritual succours of this holy institution, now, alas! too generally slighted and prophaned. I shall, in the first place, shew you the infinite, alarming necessity of *blowing the trumpet in our Zion, sanctifying a fast, and calling a solemn assembly, to implore the LORD to spare his people, and give not his heritage to reproach.*

After which I shall endeavour to prove that these seasons of general humiliation when observed with suitable dispositions of soul and body, have a natural tendency to conciliate the favour of our offended God. *Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people.*

O! that our own experience may confirm the blessed, interesting truth!

It

It has been observed that a land of levity SERM.
is a land of guilt. How much all ranks XIX.
and degrees among us are degenerated from
that composed and manly frame of spirit,
which was formerly the characteristick of
an Englishman, and which is, indeed,
the native soil of every virtue, must be
obvious to the most inattentive observer.
There was a time when the professed man
of *pleasure* was almost universally marked
out as an object of ridicule, reproach, and
contempt: one whose evil communication
would have insensibly corrupted the good
morals of all, who but countenanced and
associated with him. And while this prin-
ciple retained its influence, the national
manners were safe. The annals of our coun-
try will enable us to fix, with the utmost
precision, the inauspicious æra, when it
was first not only universally weakened
and impaired, but almost annihilated at
one stroke. When hypocrisy, rebellion,
and hell had completed their great work,
which, to the latest period of time, will

remain

SERM.
XIX.

remain a monument of infamy to our name and nation; no sooner did the *restoration* take place, than, to avoid the imputation of *hypocrisy*, which had changed religion into rebellion, faith into faction, and a zeal for the glory of God into sacrilege, treason, and murder—than an indiscriminate contempt of every sacred principle of action became the criterion of loyalty, politeness, and an elevated understanding. A few loose maxims of a vague and undefined idea, denominated *honour*, were substituted instead of the eternal sanctions of religion.—Honour without honesty! and reputation among men attainable by the blasphemer, the whoremonger, the drunkard, and the duellist! as if eternal infamy, in the next world was no exclusion from good company in this. Then it was, that the moulds of decency were sapped to the foundation, and that torrent of irreligion, libertinism, and infidelity first broke in upon us, which, gradually increasing its force by the addition of every
sink

link of corruption, seems to threaten, at the present day, a total subversion of all that is truly great and praise-worthy among us. The restraints which God and nature had provided for our security, being thus generally rejected, *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God* and moral fitness, is become the character of man and woman of all ranks, ages, and conditions.—Pleasure! the great object of universal pursuit—the mighty idol, at whose altar our time, fortune, health, fame, understanding, religion, body and soul are every day notoriously sacrificed. A few stated seasons for innocent relaxation and amusement were all that the manly simplicity of our ancestors required. But now the whole lives of many among us are little less than one eternal carnival of sensuality, and despicable selfishness, in which the sanctity of the marriage bed is prophaned, the sacred bands of friendship are dissolved by exorbitant gaming, the amiable duties of benevolence are violated, unsuspecting
innocence

SERM.
XIX.

SER. M.
XIX.

innocence and beauty are, almost without reproach betrayed into the paths of infamy; and every man regards himself as a kind of Leviathan sent into the world merely to sport and take his pastime, at the expence of all laws human and divine—to the disgrace not only of our national character, but of human nature itself. Lord, how are they encreased that rise up against thy holy ordinances! the children of violence, improving on the irreligious, immoral, and profligate examples of their superiours, have trusted in wrong and robbery, till the habitation of our dwellings, our property, and our lives are exposed to dangers, which almost forebode the dissolution of society. The sword of the magistrate is reduced to that last state of mournful inefficacy—punishing by death what it ought to have prevented by fear. “Because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God among us; but by swearing and lying, and killing and stealing, and committing adultery, they break

“break out, and blood toucheth blood;
“therefore shall the land mourn, and every
“one that dwelleth therein shall lan-
“guish.”

SERM.
XIX.

There was a time when the impregnable chastity of a British matron was almost proverbial; and conjugal infidelity, but in a single instance, was regarded as a reproach to the whole kingdom: female innocence silently retired into corners, covered with the blush of confusion for a falling sister; lamenting that the world had reason to admit a *possibility* for the wife of an Englishman to violate her faith.

But now, since the most unreserved familiarity and unblushing forwardness is the politeness of woman, and open barefaced incontinency and contempt of religion, the wit and wisdom of man; our publick assemblies are too often but so many notorious panders to vice, making provision for the flesh, and supplying the most convenient opportunities for fulfilling the lusts thereof. Now, therefore, seduction, adultery,

SERM.
XIX.

tery, detection, and divorce are such common occurrences—but let our enemies finish the horrid contrast; for I have neither abilities nor inclination to describe our national degeneracy. “O! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the sins of the daughters of my people! How shall I pardon thee for this? saith the LORD—thy children have forsaken me; when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot’s houses.”

Tremble, ye destroyers of your country! lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God! see the fatal influence of your example in the crying sins of a devoted land. The moon hides her face at our midnight enormities, and the morning blushes at our unfinished debauch. The concubine is notoriously kept; is openly resorted to by the married as well as the single; by those, who at the present moment,

ment, are sitting at the right hand of SERM.
XIX.
power, by their own detestable example encouraging the vices of all below them. Uninfluenced by the royal virtues—lost not only to religion and genuine honour, but even to decency itself; are they ashamed when they commit these abominations? They are not ashamed, neither do they blush. They glory in their shame, are proud of their reproach, and sport themselves with perdition. This is the work of pleasure!

Yes! pleasure is, in many respects, more pernicious than vice itself. *That* has naturally so much loathsomeness and horror in it as to deter every ingenuous mind from its embraces. It startles and alarms the conscience, and puts us upon our guard. But pleasure, under the colour of being innocent and palatable, tempts us to the repeated draught, till, like an opiate, it stupefies and befots the soul; and then vice, losing its native horror, imperceptibly insinuates itself, becomes familiar,

SERM.
XIX.

miliar, is indulged and caressed as the source of happiness, till those fatal hours arrive, when it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

You must now see, acknowledge, and deplore the fatal consequences of that epidemical rage for pleasure, which is evidently the chief source of these flagitious enormities. When in the burning pursuit men have sacrificed their conscience, and every generous principle, they cannot but vindictively set their faces against an institution, which is incessantly reproaching their degeneracy: and, since religion is their enemy, they are determined to be the enemy of religion; and when the moment of adversity and distress overtakes them, then the soul, destitute of all solid comfort, can discover no possible way to escape insufferable anguish and despair, but in the hope of annihilation. Thus a being who came from the hands of his Creator, but little lower than the angels, deliberately degrades himself to the condition of the brutes

brutes that perish! Is this he who was SERM.
XIX.
formed after the image of an uncreated excellence, conscious of immortality, capable of moral perfection, bought with a price—a price inestimable, a mighty work and labour of love—to be the blessed servant of God, who has thus ingloriously sold himself to be the slave of iniquity? the poor despicable drudge of his own everlasting infamy! a reproach to his Maker, a sorrow to his Saviour, and the loudest triumph of hell!

Our promiscuous, barefaced incontinences, our notorious adulteries and abominable filthiness of worse than brutal lusts, our too general contempt, and violation of all religious, moral, and social duty, have, as it were, hung out a flag of defiance against Omnipotence itself.

Men and brethren, what shall we do? whither shall we flee for security?

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify
“a fast, call a solemn assembly! our help
“standeth only in the name of the LORD

SERM.
XIX.

“our God.” And as evidently as universal luxury and self-indulgence have weakened our moral powers, and added strength to our corrupt sensual passions, so evidently is the duty of fasting and bodily mortification necessary to those, who would obtain a victory over the temptations of the world, and indulge a hope of recommending themselves to the compassion of a pure and holy and spiritual Judge.

The flesh warreth against the spirit; and the enemy is never so effectually vanquished, as when he is reduced by famine. That hunger is not holiness we are ready to admit; but that it may easily be improved into a glorious mean or instrument of it, universal practice has asserted, and general experience confirmed. The prophet, therefore, does not barely say, *proclaim* a fast, but in the emphatical words of my text, *sanctify*, that is, hallow, or render it *holy*; make it subservient to moral and religious purposes, by availing yourselves of that humble and serious and re-

collected

collected frame of mind, which bodily mortification has a natural tendency to produce; and let it lead you to Godly sorrow, heartfelt repentance, and strenuous resolutions of immediate reformation. The whole weight and emphasis of the exhortation rests upon this. He therefore immediately repeats the expressive term—*sanctify* the congregation; and if the following words be regarded as an explanation of his meaning, which the highly figurative prophetick language will admit, it will not be necessary to seek for any further instruction as to the dispositions of mind requisite to render our fast an acceptable day unto the Lord, and (through the merits of a crucified Redeemer) an efficacious propitiation for our past sins. “Assemble the *Elders*,” says he—let such only presume to approach the holy assembly, whose sensual passions are in a state of *subjection*, similar to those of men far advanced in wisdom and in years. “Gather the children, and those that suck

SERM.
XIX.

“the breast”—persons of meek, humble, and governable spirits; according to our blessed LORD’s description of the dispositions necessary for the reception of the Gospel—“except ye be converted, and become as *little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven:” or, as the Psalmist speaks—“I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother; yea, my soul is even as a weaned child.” “*Let the bridegroom* (he proceeds) *go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet*”—let every species of worldly indulgence and sensual gratification be this day suspended; and let the apparel of the soul—the wedding garment of repentance, and holy resolutions be the only object of our solicitude: correspondent to that of the apostles; “abstain that ye may give yourselves unto fasting and prayer, and let not your adorning be that outward adorning of wearing of gold, but let it

“be

“ be the hidden man of the heart, in that
 “ which is not corruptible, even the orna-
 “ ment of a meek and quiet, or *serious*,
 “ spirit, which is in the sight of God of
 “ great price.”

SERM.
 XIX.

Having thus hungered and thirsted after righteousness—acquired by bodily mortifications, these necessary dispositions; we are to assemble ourselves together in the place of publick worship, and there let the “ priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep “ between the porch and the altar,”—on the bended knees of their souls and bodies, confess, acknowledge, and deplore our crying complicated national sins; and *let them say*, “ spare thy people, O LORD, and “ give not thine heritage to reproach.” Let them exert all the sacred prevalence of prayer to deprecate those most alarming judgements, the thunder and lightening of almighty vengeance just ready to burst over our devoted heads. And let every reasonable creature, from this awful mo-

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ment,

SER M.
XIX.

ment, enter into a solemn covenant between God and his own soul, to walk from henceforth in the works of his laws, and in the ways of his commandments; casting out of his bosom every thing that can be offensive to the eyes of his immaculate holiness. "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people."

Comfortable! most comfortable declaration! who shall circumscribe the power of that Being to whom all things in heaven and earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey? Whatever our difficulties and dangers may be, and how much soever beyond any human strength to adjust and divert; yet he has passed his immutable word, that upon our repentance and reformation, he will be "jealous for his land" "and pity his people;" or, as it is expressed in the 14th verse, "he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him."

I have proclaimed the fast, and O! be prevailed on, my brethren, to lay these things

things seriously to heart. And when you retire to such holy and necessary meditations, may the Father of Mercies influence those moments to the advancing of your happiness here, and of your eternal salvation hereafter.

SERM.
XIX.

SERMON XX.

THE NATURE AND EFFICACY

OF

REPENTANCE.

PREACHED BY

JOHN WATSON, D.D.

things seriously to heart. And when you
refer to such holy and necessary medita-
tions, may the Father of Mercies influence
those moments to the advantage of your
happiness here, and of your eternal felicity
in heaven.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

Wm. Pitt

S E R M O N XX.

S E R M O N XX.

THE NATURE AND EFFICACY
OF
REPENTANCE,

RAHAB JUSTIFIED.

SERMON XX.

THE NATURE AND EFFICACY

OF

REPENTANCE.

BY JAMES JUSTIFIED.

S E R M O N XX.

Likewise, also was not Rahab, the harlot, justified?

James, ii. latter part of 25th.

OF the mighty efficacy of repentance, SERM.
XX.
in cleansing the soul from the pollutions of sin, whoever presumes to doubt, not only betrays a total disbelief of the sacred scriptures, but his ignorance of the several ingredients, or component parts, of which true repentance consists.

For the effects of sorrow on the human heart, in softening it down to every impression of tenderness, and eradicating the sentiments of pride, vain confidence, and self-sufficiency, we may refer him to those sons and daughters of affliction, whom the Divine Providence feedeth with

SERM.
XX.

the bread of tears, and giveth them plenteousness of tears to drink. *Shame*, while it rends and agonises the bosom, writes its triumphs on the face, in characters too legible to escape the observation of any one. And of that great animal principle, *Fear*, we may affirm, in the language of the Apostle, that it is "quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." *Anger* transports a man beyond himself; and *Love* will change his very nature. And if such be the effect of each of these passions singly exerting itself, what may we not expect from the united influence of all together?

Now, these are but the several ingredients which enter into the composition of that mighty restorative of the soul, *Repentance*, and are all evidently included in it. Sorrow for having miserably fallen from the dignity of our nature, and forfeited our most glorious privilege, the approbation

probation of conscience, and of the blessed Author of our being ;—shame for the infamous and loathsome condition, to which we have degraded ourselves ;—fear and apprehension of punishment, inseparably connected with consciousness of guilt ;—anger at sin, the cause of our self-detestation ; and, the natural consequence of all—conversion to God, with sincere purpose of amendment, together with love of his adorable perfections, in the imitation of which, we now feel and acknowledge the happiness of a moral agent is, by the eternal and unalterable constitution of things, only to be found.

Less than this cannot, upon the principles of rational deism, and natural religion, be called repentance: and if to the joint influence of these causes, thus mighty in operation, we add what the Christian system has so abundantly secured and confirmed to us, the concurring grace and assistance of the Divine Spirit; we cannot but perceive the utmost reason to admit
the

SERM.

XX.

the truth of all those miracles of its efficacy, which both sacred and civil history have recorded.

The language of the inspired writers upon this subject is remarkable for its affecting energy and emphasis; "Repent ye (says St. Paul, preaching at Jerusalem)" and "be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing—or *soul-restoring*—shall come from the presence of the LORD." The original word, which we translate *repent*, signifies a total alteration of the mind, a kind of spiritual metamorphosis in which a man receives a new soul and new affections, in exchange for his *old*, impaired and corrupted by sin.

The same expressive idea recurs in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where, speaking of those, "who being past feeling,"—or *having sinned away their moral sense*—and so given themselves over unto lasciviousness, "to work all uncleanness with greediness," he exhorts his Christian converts to "*put off the old man*, and to be
"renewed

"renewed in the spirit of their mind, by
 "putting on the new man, which, after
 "God, is created in righteousness, and
 "true holiness." This notion is also in-
 cluded in that term of our own language,
 by which we express the blessed effects of
 true repentance—*reformation*.

SERM.
 XX.

Our LORD and SAVIOUR, JESUS
 CHRIST, in his conference with Nicodemus,
 has adopted a still more interesting
 stile, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee,
 "except a man *be born again*, he cannot
 "see the kingdom of God;" as if it was
 in the power of effectual repentance even
 to annihilate the man of sin, and to re-
 produce him a new creature, capable of
 serving and obeying God—in the language
 of the church, to effect a death unto sin,
 and a new birth unto righteousness. Cor-
 respondent to this, converted penitents,
 when in their first state of regeneration,
 are frequently represented under the cha-
 racter of *new-born babes*; in a progressive
 state towards manhood, to be nourished up
 gradually

SERM.
XX.

gradually by the "sincere milk of the
"word," until they come unto perfection,
unto the measure of the stature of the
fulness of CHRIST.

Nay, even that awful mystery, the resurrection from the dead, is frequently employed to illustrate the power of this medicine of the soul. "Awake, thou that sleepest (says the Apostle) and arise from the dead; and CHRIST shall give thee light." So again, still more fully in the Epistle to the Colossians; "If ye then be risen with CHRIST"—risen from the death of sin unto a new life of righteousness—"seek those things which are above." "*Mortify*, therefore—abso-
lutely kill and destroy—your members which are upon the earth—or your earthly and sensual passions—fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."

By

By the help of this leading idea, we may illustrate many obscure passages in the writings of the Apostles, and particularly that celebrated exclamation of St. Paul, in the character of the unregenerate; "O! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" To which he immediately adds, "I thank God, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD." As if he had said, "eternal glory and gratitude be rendered to the Father of Mercies, who hath given us power to escape even from this most wretched and loathsome dungeon of corruption and death, with which our polluted bodies have surrounded us, by hearty repentance, through faith in him, who was ordained to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of prison to them that are bound, and resurrection from the dead."

SERM.
XX.

SERM.
XX.

We may recollect that all these wonders of the efficacy of repentance have been repeatedly exemplified in real life. What are the histories of David, Hezekiah, Nebuchadnezzar, the Ninevites, the apostatizing Peter, and the persecuting Paul, and, indeed, of all the primitive heroes of religion, the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs; what are they all but the recorded triumphs of repentance?—plain demonstrations, accommodated to the universal sense of mankind, that it has infallible power, wherever it is suffered to have its perfect work, to bring every sinner, without exception, within the reach of God's mercy—to seal his pardon in heaven, and render him capable of admission to that blessed place, when he shall go hence, and be no more seen.

To encourage all who hear me this day, to an immediate application of the same means; to guard against presumption, on the

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the one hand, and despair on the other; I shall endeavour to illustrate this great and interesting doctrine, by an appeal to matter of fact—a case eminent and affecting, repeatedly recorded and authenticated by the Spirit of God, as an antidote against those particular sins of sensual impurity, which characterise our own polluted times and declining country.

SERM.
XX.

When Joshua, by immediate commission from the LORD of Hosts, undertook the reduction of the idolatrous nations, and the conquest of the land of Canaan, he thought it adviseable to send two spies to the city of *Jericho*, which was opposite to the spot where he was to pass the river Jordan, in order to take a view of the situation, strength, and avenues of the place. The persons appointed to this hazardous undertaking appear to have possessed every necessary qualification, being not only prudent and valiant, but actuated by a generous zeal for the glory of God, and the honour of true religion.

L 2

Having

SERM.
XX.

Having gained the city in safety, and made their observations, they were directed by chance—or, rather let me say, for the event will abundantly justify it, they were conducted, by the merciful providence of God, to a house of publick entertainment, the mistress of which, through a deplorable want of religious education, and the necessary restraints of virtuous principles, had, in very early life, abandoned herself to prostitution. We are expressly told, in the second chapter of the book of Joshua, that “they came into an *harlot’s* house, “named Rahab, and lodged there.” And again, in the 6th chapter, and at the 22d verse, we read, that “Joshua said “unto the two men, that had spied out “the country, go into the *harlot’s* house, “and bring out Rahab:” and once more, at the 25th of the same chapter, “and “Joshua saved Rahab, the harlot.” It is true that the Hebrew word, Zonah, here translated an harlot, may, in some instances, signify simply an *hostess*, or the mistress of
a pub-

a publick house. But the reason of this evidently confirms the present acceptation of the word; because the profession itself, being regarded as infamous in those days, none but such who had renounced all pretensions to character, were ever known to engage in it, and whose *persons* were notoriously as common as their houses.

SERM.
XX.

But to remove the matter beyond doubt, it is asserted by the Apostles St. Paul and St. James, who wrote by the infallible spirit of God, that she was an *harlot*: the Greek word Πορν, used in both places, admitting of no other interpretation than that of a wretched creature, who prostitutes herself for hire.

It is highly probable, that in the course of their conversation, the holy men, ever attentive to the sacred interests of virtue, charitably took an opportunity of setting before her the unspeakable danger, misery, and baseness of her course of life; instructing her in the knowledge of the true God, whose honour she had hitherto given

SERM.
XX.

to idols, and her own body to the impurities of their worship; and revealing to her the divine will, so far as it related to herself, and the object of their commission. What will add great strength to this conjecture is, that we are not destitute of respectable authority for calling one of her kind admonishers, *Phineas*, which was the name of that genuine *man of honour*, who had already established his reputation, by his exemplary zeal against the sins of impurity, in the case of Cozbi, the Midianitish princess. Indeed this seems to constitute the most striking feature of his character. It is, therefore, natural to suppose, that his benevolent exhortations would be forcibly employed on that topic. This, however, is evident, from that moment her conscience began to speak, and represented her sin in its full bulk of malignity; her bosom travelled with repentance, and felt the pangs of goodly sorrow. An awful apprehension of the Divine perfections renewed a right spirit

spirit within her, and induced her to offer SERM.
XX.
up on the altar of a broken and a contrite heart, such a sacrifice of faith as the tender Father of Mercies and Love could not reject and despise. Hear her glorious declaration and confession: "I know that the LORD hath given you the land." The expression is remarkably emphatical; she does not say, I *believe* that he *will*, but in the full assurance of faith, *I know that he hath*;—I have as perfect a conviction of the infallible certainty of the Divine Promise, as if you were already in actual possession of it. "For the LORD your God, (she proceeds) *He* is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath!" These are her own words. Here, therefore, her recovery from idolatry, sin, and death, was unexceptionably manifested, and the work of her regeneration advancing apace towards perfection. "By *faith* (says the Epistle to the Hebrews) that is by this illustrious and heroick confession of a true faith—" Rahab, the harlot, perished not

S E R M. " with those who perished in their disobedience:"—as the words should be translated.

XX.

To our comfort and edification the sacred history enables us to trace on her conversion to the next immediate stage in the progress of regeneration; the personal practice of good works. Intelligence being brought to the King of Jericho, that the spies were in the city, and executioners sent to apprehend them; she ventured, at the evident hazard of her life, to conceal the holy men, whose admonitions had thus rescued her from perdition; and, with all the generous solicitude of a good and grateful heart, watched for the moment of safety; when she conducted them, with presents, prayers, and blessings, to their own people. " Was not Rahab, the harlot (says my text) justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and sent them out another way?" Observe then, we have the infallible warranty of the spirit of God to support us in

in asserting that the penitent prostitute SERM.
XX.
was, by the joint influence of faith and works, rendered holy in the sight of God.

Let us now never more be told of justification by faith alone.

See too the *extent* of God's mercy towards her: she was saved from the general massacre, which soon after drenched the city in blood;—the lives of her dear parents and relations were saved for her sake, when every other living creature fell a miserable sacrifice to fire and sword; and above all, she was saved from the eternal penalties of her former sins.

Her praise is in the book of life. Her name is inscribed on the glorious roll of the elect of God; and—to display the efficacy of repentance beyond every suggestion of infidelity—to demonstrate its power to restore the human soul to its original purity, holy, acceptable unto God—she was soon after married to a *Prince of Judah*, and became the mother of *Boaz*, who was the father of *Obed*, who was the father

SERM. father of *Jesse*, whow as the father of
 XX. *David*, who was the illustrious progenitor
 of our blessed and adorable Saviour JESUS
 CHRIST.

So that the immaculate Lamb of God did not disdain to admit the poor penitent of Canaan into his own honourable tribe, parentage, and family. And there is no doubt but she is long since "come unto
 " the city of the Living God, the hea-
 " venly Jerusalem, and the innumerable
 " company of angels, to the general assem-
 " bly and church of the first-born,
 " which are written in heaven, and to the
 " spirits of just men, like herself, made
 " perfect," by faith and repentance, and
 now participating in the exalted, generous
 satisfaction, resulting from the recovery
 and salvation of a lost soul.

" I say unto you (saith he, who came
 down from the realms of eternal blessed-
 ness on purpose to reveal their glories, in
 order to excite and encourage us to qualify
 ourselves for them) " I say unto you, that

“there is joy in heaven over one sinner that
“repenteth, more than over ninety and
“nine just persons, who need no repen-
“tance.”

S E R M.
XX.

Children of Rahab! come now let us
reason together. You see upon what cer-
tain indisputable authority we can assure
you, that there is a mean, by the sincere
application of which, “though your sins
“be as scarlet, they shall be as white as
“snow, though they be red like crimson,
“they shall be as wool.”

The gospel of JESUS CHRIST is in your
hands; the very end and aim of whose
commission, and of all his precepts, doc-
trines, and sacraments was to call—not
the righteous—but sinners to repentance.
He has taught you how fearful a thing it is
to fall into the hands of the living God,
in a state of habitual impurity; that if you
should be summoned to your account be-
fore the work of regeneration is perfected
within you—(and oh! consider with me a
moment the hair-hung uncertainty of life)
you

SERM.
XX.

you are utterly, irretrievably ruined and undone, body and soul, to all eternity. "For these things sake, the wrath of God"—the inexorable vengeance of almighty Power—"cometh on the impenitent children of disobedience." Death cannot purify; the grave cannot discharge the deep-admitted stains of pollution. The constrained forbearance of impotent old age will not extinguish, or atone for, the fire of lust; because "out of the heart" may still proceed fornications and adulteries." Till that is purified, continence is no chastity. Speedy therefore—immediate—like the conversion of *Rahab*, must be the work of your reformation. She was convinced, in a moment, of the ineffable baseness and danger of her condition, and improved the first faint dawnings of grace. To depend on *future* repentance to save you from perdition, when futurity itself is not in our power, is an infatuation, which none but the inveterate enemy of your souls, who would

would triumph in your damnation, could possibly inspire. In the very prime of life, health, and beauty, exposed by the nature of her profession to every blandishment of sense, that can delude, seduce, and overset the reason, she made a glorious sacrifice to God, religion, and virtue. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; it is better for thee thus to enter into *life*, than that thy whole body and soul be tormented with the fire of lust here, and of hell hereafter." Every constitutional bias may be subdued by fasting and prayer. We can do all things through CHRIST strengthening us. His *grace* is sufficient for every son and daughter of sincerity—a remedy for sin of which the poor penitent of Canaan had not even the remotest conception.

Oh! for the voice of an archangel to awaken your souls to a suitable apprehension of the inestimable privileges—the ennobling powers and graces of Christianity! Are you basely content to give up all these

SERM.
XX.

these for the indulgence of sensuality. But what have you taken in exchange for your innocence? You have tasted the forbidden fruit, and found it all delusion;—mere apples of Sodom, alluring, indeed, to the senses, but within, full of execrable bitterness, and deadly poison. It promised you pleasure, and gave you self-abhorrence, loathing, infamy, and despair. And will you suffer the same dull detected lie to deceive you again? What is the infatuating soul-extinguishing power of lust? Heaven, earth, and hell join in their protest against it: you hear and are convinced; and yet—angels behold it and weep!—you abandon yourselves to its solicitations.

My brethren, if there be any consolation in CHRIST; if any comfort in the Divine Love; if any communication of the holy Spirit; if any bowels of mercy for your own immortal souls; gird up the loins of your mind, and resolutely press forward, toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of GOD, in CHRIST

JESUS;

JESUS; till your purity shall be out of the reach of danger here, and introduce you to the society of angels hereafter. SERM.
XX.

And ye, who in the walk of life have suffered yourselves to be deluded by the syren voice of sensual pleasure; seek the LORD while he may be found; return to him, this moment, through the paths of faith, repentance, and prayer:—beseeching him to wash your souls and bodies in the blood of that immaculate Lamb, who was slain to take away the sins of the world; that whatsoever defilements you may have contracted in the idolatrous Canaan of this polluted world, being purged and done away; you may be presented pure and without spot: your names written with faithful *Rahab's* in the book of life; and yourselves spiritually admitted with her into the holy family of JESUS CHRIST.
 “For whosoever (says that adorable Saviour who came to seek and to save that which was lost) “whosoever shall do the will
 “of my Father, who is in heaven, the
 “same

SERM.
XX.

“same is my brother, my sister, and my
“mother.”

“Now *this* is the will of God;” says the Apostle, with whose awful words I shall conclude; hoping you will remember *them* when the voice that now speaks them to you shall be silenced for ever, although every other part of this well-intended effusion of duty, so loudly called for by the corruption of the times, should be entirely forgotten—“this is the will of God, even
“your *sanctification*: that every one of you
“should know how to possess his vessel
“in purity and honour. But fornication
“and all uncleanness, let them not be
“once so much as named among you, but
“to reprove them: neither filthiness, nor
“foolish talking, nor jesting,” which are the incentives to vice, and indications of a corrupted heart. “Let no man deceive
“you with vain words,” which most effectually carry on the business of hell, whenever they attempt to excuse or extenuate the sins of impurity. “For this ye
“know”—

“know”—as an immutable principle, which even the universal practice of all mankind can never subvert—“ye know
“that no whoremonger, nor unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom
“of CHRIST and of GOD.”

SERM.
XX.

Think of these things; and from this moment abstain from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

And then, “while the undefiled and
“pure in heart shall be redeemed from
“among men, as the *first* fruits unto GOD,
“and shall follow the Lamb whitherso-
“ever he goeth,” those convinced and
awakened creatures shall in no wise be cast
out; but their early penitence shall be re-
warded with everlasting pardon, and their
regeneration with the riches of eternity.

S E R M O N XXI.

T H E D U T Y
O F
P U B L I C K W O R S H I P.

SERMON XXI

THE DUTY

OF

PUBLIC WORSHIP

S E R M O N XXI.

*My foot standeth right; I will praise the
Lord in the congregations."*

Pfalm, xxvi, 12.

THERE is not, perhaps, any figure
of speech, which has been so uni-
versally adopted into all languages, from
the earliest records of antiquity down to
the present day, as that which represents
human life under the idea of a pilgrimage,
or *journey*. And it is very remarkable,
that as the *general* tenor of our conduct, so
our *moral* and *religious* duties in particular,
are more frequently expressed by allusions
to this mode of speech, than by the plain
and natural terms themselves. Such, at
least, every student of the sacred volume
must immediately recollect is uniformly

S E R M.
XXI.

SERM.
XXI.

the language of scripture. Thus the character of a man of integrity and unimpeached honesty in all his dealings is described by his *walking* uprightly; and it is asserted of such a one that he *walketh* surely. In like manner, our reverence for the Supreme Being, evidenced by obedience to his laws, is called *walking* in the *ways* of the LORD, and in the *paths* of his commandments. Thus, likewise, that fulness of Divine Revelation, which is offered in the Gospel of the blessed JESUS, is foretold in these emphatical terms; "thine ear shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left."

And the necessity of such a direction for every incapacitated child of *Adam* is acknowledged by the pathetick Jeremiah, by the like beautiful allusion; "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that *walketh* to direct his *steps*," So the great Apostle
" See

“ See that ye walk circumspectly:” and again, “ as many as *walk* according to this rule, peace shall be upon them and mercy.”

SERM.
XXI.

With the same idea harmonises the author of my text, in such a variety of instances, that it can hardly have eluded the observation of the most inattentive reader; “ I will *walk* before the LORD in the land of the living. I have refrained my *feet* from every evil *way*, that I may keep thy word.” And, to mention but one more, “ thy word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.”

Thus, amidst all the difficulties, doubts, and fears, which perplex his judgement on other occasions, there is one great duty, in the discharge of which (he evidently intimates that) a reasonable creature, conscious of his dependence on the Supreme Being in every article of his existence, may, with the utmost certainty, conclude that he is always making a safe and honourable progress in the journey of life: and

SERM.
XXI.

that is, when he is resorting to the place of publick worship, in order to receive directions for his future course. Observe, I beseech you, the sacred confidence with which he insists upon this notion; "One thing have I desired of the LORD, which (says he) I will *require*, even that I may dwell in the house of the LORD, and visit his temple." The text is nothing more than a representation of himself in the act of *realising* this holy desire: "my foot standeth right; I will—or shall now—praise the LORD in the congregations." And can the soul of man be convinced of any truth what ever upon more certain evidence than the holy Psalmist, that he was *right*—absolutely right—right as far as any notices of our rational nature are to be depended on, the universal consent of mankind, the laws of every civilised country upon the face of the earth, and, above all, the most solemn and reiterated commands of the Most High God himself—that he was *perfectly, infallibly* right, when

when his footsteps conducted him to the place of publick worship on the stated seasons of devotion?

SERM.
XXI.

“ I speak as unto wise men; judge ye
“ what I say:”—favour it with your un-
prejudiced attention, for a few minutes,
if but from deference to the advice of So-
lomon, who tells us that “ the wisdom of
“ the prudent is to understand his way.”
Now, to enable ourselves to make up our
minds with equal certainty on the subject
before us, we must examine the principles
on which the Psalmist formed his decision;
and while we acknowledge him to be right,
determine, if we can, how *wrong*—how
unspeakably and inexcusably wrong must that
man be, who has suffered himself to decline
into habitual irreligion, and the irrational,
degrading enormities of continual sabbath-
breaking—verifying that of the philoso-
pher, “ there is a *way* which *seemeth right*
“ unto a man, but the end thereof are the
“ ways of death.” And,

First,

SERM.
XXI.

First, as certainly and demonstrably as the vice of ingratitude—that blackest character of hell—must be *wrong*; so every emotion of the contrary virtue must shed a glory on human nature, and, while it improves, recommend it to the object of our adoration. Now it was the discharge of this necessary duty, in particular, which the Psalmist had in contemplation, when he so decidedly declares, “my foot standeth right:” because he was then going forth on purpose to *praise* the LORD in the congregations; that is, to make a publick acknowledgement of the Divine Goodness to him: as he has more fully expressed himself in the 66th psalm—“O! come hither and hearken, all ye that fear GOD, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.” And in the 116th, “I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will pay my vows unto the LORD, now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the LORD’s house.” And again, in the 118th,

118th, "open me the gates of righteousness, that I may go into them, and give thanks unto the LORD."

SERM.
XXI.

Another reason, which produced in his soul the conviction that he was *right*, when he resorted to the place of publick worship, was his knowledge that God had been pleased to declare, he would there, with more peculiar favour, hear and receive the prayers and supplications of his people, and give them the most endearing tokens of his parental love.

It has, indeed, been asked, why we may not as acceptably worship God in our own houses as in his; a question which, short as it is, involves a whole legion of absurdities: it either supposes that the discharge of one duty may be a dispensation from another, and so is as foolish as it is prophane; or else, that *self-love* is as generous and amiable a principle as disinterested charity and universal benevolence. Private prayer is an act of faith beneficial to ourselves

SERM.
XXI.

selves only. Publick prayer is a soul-enobling sacrifice of glory, gratitude, and praise; the more acceptable to the ineffably good and merciful Father of all, as it has a tendency to improve the rest of his children, and reclaim them to the paths of genuine wisdom, virtue, and happiness. If it be *good* to pray for our brethren, it is evidently *better* to make them pray *with* us. And never does the sacred fire of devotion blaze forth so intensely on the altar of the human heart, or attain to such heights of abstraction from the world, as when it is fanned by the breath of sympathy and communion. Every day's experience must convince us, that there is something attractive and assimilating in *good*, as well as *evil* example. And when, like the Royal Prophet, persons of exalted rank in society are regular in their attendance on the publick ordinances of religion; they will not only have the immediate satisfaction—the greatest satisfaction the soul of benevolence is capable of feeling—

ing—to conduct others to their duty and their happiness; in one word, to establish a reverence for what is right, as far as the influence of example can do it; but they will entitle themselves to a participation of that glory, which is reserved for the venerable reformers of society: “they
“ that be wise (says the prophet) and turn
“ many to righteousness shall shine as the
“ brightness of the firmament, and as the
“ stars for ever and ever!”

SERM.
XXI.

And how must the habitual absenter from publick worship stand condemned by the suffrage of his own conscience, when he hears that the very heathens themselves, while their united wisdom confirms the rectitude of the Psalmist's notions, are unanimous in their protest against the principles and practices of such a one as himself.

When it was demanded of *Lycurgus*, the Spartan Legislator, why, in his laws for the regulation of external religion, he enjoined oblations of so little price? His
answer

SERM.
XXI.

answer was; "that no man living might
"have an excuse for failing to pay his
"publick acknowledgements to the Gods."

And the celebrated Plato, having laid the foundation of all law in the belief of the existence of a God, as the most universal principle, supports it by an appeal to indisputable matter of fact—that from the East to the West, or throughout the extent of the earth, all men, barbarians as well as Greeks, are seen and heard prostrating themselves before, and supplicating the Deity.

When *Socrates* was accused of not serving those Gods who were worshipped by his fellow-citizens; he does not seek to justify himself by alledging any private devotions, in his own house, but proves the charge to be false, by showing that he regularly sacrificed on the publick altars, on the appointed festivals. It is a memorable saying of *Seneca*, that before we admit any one to be entitled to the character of an *honest man*, we must enquire
what

what evidence he has given of his reverence for the Supreme Being.

SERM.
XXI.

So *Isocrates*, the Grecian orator, enjoins it as an indispensable rule of decency to worship the Deity, as at other times, so especially with our fellow-citizens. “ Thus “ (says he) you will be *seen* discharging “ two necessary duties at once, sacrificing “ to the Gods, and obeying the laws of “ your country :”—an idea sanctioned by the highest and most venerable authority ; “ Let your *light* (says the adorable Saviour of the world—let your regard for the sacred interests of religion—) “ so shine before men, they may *see* your good “ works,” and be induced by your example, “ to glorify your Father which is in “ heaven.”

It is to be lamented, that as the world is at present constituted, there is hardly any other unexceptionable method left of recommending religion, than our own personal practice of it. To make it the subject of our conversation has been voted
1 unpolite,

SERM.
XXI.

unpolite, enthusiastick, perhaps hypocritical. And *Fashion* is a tyrant, whose votaries are as strong in numbers as they are weak in judgement: and yet the demands of duty in this case are evident and irresistible.

For, consider with me, I beseech you, why were infinite wisdom, goodness, and power so illustriously displayed in the creation of the universe, and that awful appeal to reason inscribed on every atom of his works—"Hallelujah, for the LORD
"GOD Omnipotent reigneth!" but that he himself being visible in them, might be universally acknowledged and glorified? Let every man, therefore, who is in his cool, sober senses, determine for himself, whether an habitual neglect of the publick ordinances of the church be not emphatically *wrong*—wrong with respect to his fellow-citizens, as well as himself, whose most sacred principles of conduct are in perpetual danger of being corrupted by his pestilent example.

But

But if such characters should be supposed to be out of the reach of arguments resulting from any generous and social principles of conduct, let them endeavour to work on their own fears and self-love, by asking themselves, while the possibility of reformation is yet in their power, how they shall ever be able to answer to God and their own souls, for wilfully neglecting all the blessed opportunities of laying up in store for themselves a competent stock of those spiritual riches, without which we must be poor and blind and miserable and naked to all eternity.

It is the express command of the Most High God, that we should hallow his sabbath, and reverence his sanctuary; and of his blessed only-begotten Son, who died upon the Cross for us men and for our salvation—even of him whom we have bound our souls, at our baptismal covenant, to obey, “not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” And the laws of almost

S E R M.

XXI.

every country, where christianity has obtained a regular establishment, have, by a variety of pains and penalties, enjoined the same—as consulting not only the good order and peace of society, but the dignity of human nature itself. Hence it is that the highest spiritual punishment, which they can inflict on the incorrigible reprobate is to exclude him from the publick ordinances of the church.

Now, if any one shall be found among us, who, from attachment to the sordid interests and pleasures of the world, or from constitutional indisposition to spiritual objects, voluntarily neglects them; what character must he expect to fix on himself? Either that of a perjured enemy to his country, his God, and his Redeemer, or else of one so abjectly low in the class of intellectuals, as to be satisfied with being ranked with the poor horrible tribe of Materialists and Atheists.

For could we suppose a person so deplorably *wrong* in the object of his ambition,

as to wish to convince his neighbours that he was ignorant and impious enough for downright *Atheism*; it is, perhaps, impossible to conceive how he could do it with more success than by obstinately refusing to join in the publick worship of Almighty God.

SERM.
XXI.

This, at least, we may with confidence assert, that it is incumbent on every virtuous citizen, who has either the happiness of society, the reputation of his country, or the Divine glory at heart, to regard all such self-excommunicated persons with the same indifference and contempt as *they* do the rational ordinances of publick religion—remembering who it is hath said, “them that honour me I will honour, and “they that despise me shall be lightly “esteemed.”

Neither may the *unbeliever* in *revelation* think himself unconcerned in the present argument; since it is admitted as an incontestible principle of the *Laws of Na-*

SERM.
XXI.

ture, that "every man who is capable of
 " a due exercise of his reason, must think
 " it his duty, and will find it his pleasure,
 " to confirm himself in sentiments of
 " piety, and to excite them in others.
 " From this pleasure (says the philoso-
 " pher) enwove into the original texture
 " of the human soul, is derived external
 " worship, as well publick as private.
 " For whether we consider this worship
 " as the chief and almost *only* means of
 " exciting, cherishing, and perfecting in
 " the heart sentiments of religion, or whe-
 " ther we regard it as an homage which
 " men, as members of society, cannot
 " otherwise express, or whether we take
 " both these views of it in conjunction,
 " reason evidently makes it a duty of in-
 " dispensable necessity." And another
 " writer, of the highest celebrity, on the
 " *natural* duties of man considered as a ci-
 " tizen, has demonstrated by arguments su-
 " perior to all exception, " that it is a part
 " of

“ of *natural* religion to worship the Deity, SERM
XXI.
“ not only in private, but likewise openly
“ and publickly; for publick worship (says
“ he) both testifies our own duty, and ex-
“ cites that of others.”

Can there now be a single doubt indulged in the bosom of any one among us, but that the author of my text spoke the language of philosophy, and one of the clearest deductions from accurate reasoning, as well as manly piety, when he said, “ my foot standeth right; I will praise God in the congregations.” If not, his principles are equally obligatory on every other person, who is partaker of the same nature. Whoever sets up for an exemption from the laws of reason and moral rectitude, abandons himself to the liberty, not of a man, but of a brute beast. If we are shocked at so vile a degradation, what remains but that we avoid it by availing ourselves of the superior privileges of our nature and condition.

SERM.
XXI.

Yes; let us who enjoy the fulness of divine revelation—who are so thoroughly instructed in the nature of that service which the Deity himself hath been pleased to declare most acceptable to him—who partake of such communications of his mercy and love as are beyond even the conception of the Psalmist:—let us *feel* and admit ourselves obliged to *equal* him, at least in expressions of gratitude and rational devotion.

Under the Gospel, *every* holy motive presses upon our souls to inspire us with an ardor congenial with *his*, when he so pathetically exclaimed; “how amiable are
“ thy dwellings, O LORD of Hosts! my
“ soul hath a desire and longing —yea even
“ fainteth—to enter into the courts of the
“ LORD—the place where GOD’s honour
“ dwelleth!”

Remembering that if we are sincerely solicitous to approve ourselves worthy members of the church of CHRIST mili-
tant

tant here on earth; we shall hereafter be admitted unto the “city of the Living
“God, and to an innumerable company
“of Angels; even to the general Assem-
“bly and church of the first-born, which
“are written in heaven, and to the spi-
“rits of just men made perfect:”—now
more worthily rendering seraphick glory
to him, in the mansions of eternity.

SERM.
XXI.

Now to God the Father, &c.

that here on earth; we shall hereafter be
 admitted unto the "city of the living
 God," and to an innumerable company
 of Angels; even to the general Assem-
 bly and church of the first-born, which
 are written in heaven, and to the spi-
 rits of just men made perfect:—now
 more worthily rendering israhelick glory
 to him, in the mansions of eternity.

Wm. G. and W. F. 31.

S E R M O N XXII.

OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER
R E F U T E D.

SERMON XXII.

OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER

REFUTED.

S E R M O N XXII,

What profit should we have if we pray unto him?

Job, xxi. latter part of 15th.

THAT nothing else than the utter sub-
version of all religion—natural as
well as revealed—is the ultimate aim of
scepticism and *infidelity*, must be evident
to those who recollect with what malicious
industry the doctrine of a *particular Pro-*
vidence has been reviled, railed at, and ri-
diculed by its most celebrated advocates.
I shall reserve the refutation of their ob-
jections on this topick, for the subject of
another discourse; and, at present attend
to that loudest call of *duty*—to show you
one of the unspeakably dreadful conse-
quences of ever suffering ourselves to be
persuaded

SERM.
XXII.

SERM.
XXII.

persuaded to admit a single doubt of this most interesting doctrine;—the necessary basis and support of all religion. For if the concerns of individuals are unworthy the attention of their creator; what becomes of the great and universal duty of *prayer*? All our addresses to the Deity are superseded at one stroke.

That the advocates for infidelity were aware, that this consequence would follow from their degrading and uncomfortable scheme, must appear from their readiness, upon all occasions, to strengthen and enforce it.

“The Almighty (say they) as, by his infinite *wisdom*, he *knoweth* every want of man, without our information, so, by his essential *goodness*, must be disposed to relieve it, without our importunity; or, if he be not, it is absurd to suppose, that our *intreaties* will ever produce any alteration in his all-perfect mind.

“What profit then” they demand, with equal pride and impiety, in the language
of

of the poor heathen in my text “ what
“ profit shall we have if we pray unto
“ him ?”

SERM.
XXII.

This question, which every wise man must despise, and every serious man detest at the first sound, may be thought to require a new answer at the present day, when spiritual ignorance and irreligion are, perhaps, as predominant among us, as in that of the afflicted Job.

For if, by such perverse arguings, the exercise of publick and private prayer should once be thought unnecessary; the infidel has nothing to do but to sit down and contemplate his triumphs; having performed all that his great master could require at his hands—and banished from the world every thing that deserves the name of religion.

It shall be my endeavour, therefore, in my following discourse to give one more answer to this question: and if I may be so happy as to engage your attention, I trust it will be thought a plain and satisfactory

SERM.
XXII.

factory one—fully vindicating our continual exercise of prayer to Almighty God; demonstrating it to be as high an evidence of *wisdom* as it is of *faith*; and absolutely and indispensably necessary in every state and condition of life.

Whatever pretends to the name of merit, or sets up a title to reward, must be something really and independently good; but as every tendency and disposition in our nature towards *that* must be referred to the great Author of our being, therefore all the advantages we enjoy, or are capable of, must proceed from the mere grace and favour of God; and consequently can be expected only on his *own* terms and conditions. Now, these we are taught, both in the book of nature and revelation, are that we apply for them by frequent and fervent *prayer*. So that the infidel arguments, drawn from the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, whereby he is constantly able and willing
to

to relieve us, are evidently nothing to the purpose.

SERM.
XXII.

That God may, and frequently does, confer very valuable favours on such as never direct a petition to him, they can, perhaps, demonstrate from their own personal experience. But *this* is no more a proof that therefore prayer is unnecessary, than their being suffered to *exist* is an evidence of the divine approbation of their conduct.

But since the Fountain of all Goodness has, in the opinion of every capable and impartial examiner, been pleased to make a *revelation* of his own will and councils; solemnly constituting prayer the instrument or condition of blessings; therefore every such person will no more expect the Divine favour, without petitioning for it, than any temporal end, without using its natural means.

That this is the true state of the case; witness those reiterated injunctions in scripture,

SERM.
XXII.

ture, *to pray without ceasing*—to continue instant in prayer—and to ask, if we would expect to receive.

And this duty, enjoined by revelation, has been universally taught by the common voice of nature; so that there is not a nation or country upon the face of the earth, however barbarous and uninstructed, that have not a faithful recourse to prayer in all cases of difficulty and distress.

The expediency of prayer then remaining entirely unimpeached by such objections; I proceed to present you with a catalogue of its advantages. “What profit shall we have from the Almighty, “if we pray unto him?” Much every way: as must immediately appear, to our unspeakable comfort and satisfaction, from an examination of the very nature and tendency of the duty itself, by the eternal and unalterable constitution of things.

As those who converse much in the palaces of kings, insensibly acquire a peculiar decency of conduct, and carefully watch

watch over the words of their mouth; so the accustoming of ourselves frequently to appear in prayer before the King of Kings, will naturally influence every thought, word, and action of our lives.

SERMO
XXII.

In the first place, the consideration that it is before the Almighty we are presenting ourselves—it is with the Most High God we are conversing, has an evident tendency to fill us with such an holy reverence and fear as are highly subservient to our moral improvement. It is impossible that any serious man should regard himself in the capacity of a creature addressing himself to his Creator—the author and preserver of his existence—dust and ashes to that High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity—a helpless miserable sinner to a Being of infinite Holiness, Power, Justice, and Truth, without learning the profoundest humility, or wishing to engage his friendship and protection. Nay,

SERM.
XXII.

Secondly, the very exercise of prayer will effectually teach us to guard against all the approaches of *hypocrisy*. As conscious that we thereby more immediately submit ourselves to the examination of Him, "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are, or possibly can be, hid." Yes! it requires but the weakest effort of common sense to be convinced, that the only method of appearing virtuous in the sight of infinite wisdom, is really to be so.

Thirdly; prayer will oblige us to do *justice* unto all men, and thoroughly to root out of our bosoms every species of cruelty and oppression—to suppress the very desire to gratify our malice and private revenge. As our own reason, from considering even the essential *goodness* of our God, must immediately acknowledge the equity of that declaration of the prophet, who introduces *him* to whom our petitions are addressed, so solemnly declaring,
"When

“When ye spread forth your hands, I SERM.
XXII.
“will hide mine eyes from you; yea,
“when ye make many prayers, I will not
“hear you, your hands are full of blood.”
Nay,

Fourthly, prayer will oblige us to eject the very *disposition* in our corrupt nature, to hate one another; and supply its place by the amiable graces of universal charity, benevolence, and love. For we always make it the condition of our own forgiveness from God, that we ourselves forgive others: in all our supplications we desire no more than to be treated by this kind of retaliation. If, therefore, we address ourselves to prayer, while we are inexorable to one of our fellow-creatures, who has any ways offended us, or before we have formally sealed his pardon in our hearts; Good God! what are we doing? we are entreating for vengeance instead of mercy, for judgement instead of forgiveness. As we value, therefore, our own

SER. M.
XXII.

personal safety—as we have a rational regard for ourselves, that direction of the great philanthropist must be the rule of every wise man's devotion: “If thou
“bring thy gift to the altar, or intend to
“present a single prayer there, but rememberest that thy brother hath ought
“against thee; go thy way, and first be
“reconciled to thy brother, and then come
“and offer thy gift.” But,

Fifthly; this holy exercise does tacitly oblige us to be compassionate and charitable to all our poor and distressed brethren. For, since they are equally with ourselves his dear children—the objects of his general and particular providence, of his paternal tenderness and love—can I reasonably expect that the common Father of all should favourably receive my prayers, when I am obstinately deaf to the pressing afflictions of my brother? No; it is but equitable that whoso stoppeth his ears to the crying of the poor he also shall cry himself,

self, and never be heard. My own conscience will naturally suggest the expostulation of the wise son of Sirach: "I have
" showed no mercy to a man, who is like
" myself, and do I presume to ask a bounty
" at the hands of God?" They that receive mercy from him must be themselves merciful; otherwise we suppose that he can approve of a temper of mind at irreconcilable variance with his own immutable nature, and essential attributes.

SERM.
XXII.

Reasonable prayer then, you see, has a direct evident tendency to extirpate those unnatural appetites of selfishness, avarice, and uncharitableness, the disgrace of a rational being, and the plague of society.

But this is not all; every word we use in forming a prayer suitable to the relation which subsists between the creature and the Creator, holds out some important lesson of positive righteousness, and becomes an efficacious motive to moral virtue. Examine this with me a moment, I beseech you, upon that form which is pre-

SERM.
XXII.

scribed as the Christian's directory. Can a being of common sense address himself to uncreated Excellence by the name of *Father*, without thinking of those duties of *filial obedience*, which result from that relation? Can he sincerely pray that his *name* may be *ballowed*, and his *will done on earth as it is in heaven*, and not confess himself indispensably obliged to do the utmost in his power to advance the divine glory—to rescue his venerable name from the abuse of the profane and licentious, and render it the object of universal reverence?—without teaching himself and others to abstain from all that may have the remotest tendency to displease; and, like the saints and angels in heaven, placing his own happiness, where even philosophy has always placed it—in accomplishing the pleasure of God?

When we ask for our daily bread, we cannot but feel our entire *dependence* on the Sovereign LORD of the universe, throughout every article of our existence—we learn

learn not to *cavet*, much less to obtain by fraud and force, that bread which is another's. In praying God to forgive us *our* trespasses, we oblige ourselves as it were under the tremendous penalty of a *curse*, to forgive all those who have trespassed against *us*. In beseeching him not to lead—or suffer us to be led, into temptation, we are taught to regard every species of immorality with horror, and aversion, as the highest disgrace to, and most dangerous enemy of, our nature.

SERM.
XXII.

It is evident, therefore, to a demonstration, from the imperfect catalogue of the advantages of prayer, which I have just laid before you, that it is, in its very nature, and by the eternal constitution of things, one of the most powerful incitements to virtue that can possibly be devised consistent with human free-agency. So that, if all other effects be denied, the rational use of it is incontestably attended with this—rendering us *better* and more virtuous and honest men in every station

SERM.
XXII.

and capacity of life; and, consequently, fitter objects of the Divine munificence.

And had the vain reasoners of the world submitted but to the labour of reflecting that even upon their own principles, to *deserve or qualify* ourselves for the favour of God, is the most certain method to obtain it; their objections against prayer in general must have appeared, even to themselves, as contemptibly weak as they are horribly wicked.

Prayer, then, considered in this light, is the highest species of moral instruction, and one of the most efficacious motives to social virtue: and, therefore, all the arguments that ever have been, or ever will be used against it, can only prove these two things—the *ignorance* of those, who invent them, which is the most charitable supposition; or, that they are deliberate *enemies* to virtue, to society, and to their fellow-creatures in general.

And if ignorance and malevolence are qualifications for a person to assume the

office of instructing the world, we must allow the right of infidels to publish, both in their books and conversation, all that the one or the other can suggest to undermine the faith, hope, and peace of mankind.

SER M.
XXII.

If the liturgy, or prayer-book of the church of England be regarded in this light—as an institute of moral instruction—teaching us to become fit objects of the Divine Goodness, as well as to petition for it—its superiority over every other manual of devotion will be universally evident. There is hardly a confession, prayer, or collect to be found in it, that does not discover as much attention in its compilers to our improvement in moral and social virtue—as earnest a solicitude to supply us with suitable *dispositions*, as with proper *language*, to approach the throne of Eternal Mercy.

To institute a comparison, therefore, between the prayer-book of the church of England and the extemporary prayers
of

SERM.
XXII.

of Sectarists, and Dissenters, is neither more nor less than to doubt whether one single private person be not, at once, without consideration, as capable of giving *advice* and *instruction* as a hundred:—each of whom are, at least, of equal abilities with himself, and who, having first made it the particular study of their lives to search out the infirmities of human nature, solemnly and deliberately endeavour, by a joint exertion of all their wisdom, to supply the properest remedies.

In these latter times of Christianity, when the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost are withdrawn, we dare not affirm that any prayer—as to the *mode* of it—is given by inspiration of God; but that every publick prayer ought to be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, or morality—that men may read their duty in their devotions, has, I trust, been satisfactorily proved. And if in the *multitude* of counsellors—that is, in a great number

number of persons, properly qualified to advise and instruct—there be *safety*; or only less danger of *error* than in the unpremeditated dictates of a private person, as we admit in every other occurrence of life; how then any modest reasonable man should hesitate a moment whether the established liturgy of the church, or the extemporaneous effusions of the meeting-house, has the better right to his attention; is altogether unaccountable. Universal experience will attest, that should such a question be proposed in any other case, where the prejudices of education have not utterly disabled the judgement; it would be thought an affront to common sense.

Those who in some degree preside over society, who are concerned in its regulations; whose exalted stations give them frequent opportunities of surveying the general conduct; are evidently the properest persons to determine what *instruction* is necessary, as well for preserving the
general

S E R M.
XXII.

SER.M.
XXII.

general peace, as the virtue of individuals. And as prayer has been shewn to be one of the most efficacious modes of instruction, it is, therefore, demonstrable, that *publick* prayer may be sometimes injurious, frequently impertinent, and always of *uncertain* direction, when trusted to the extemporary conception, and expressions of any private character whatsoever.

But as nothing of this is any ways applicable to our own national liturgy, which has already stood the test and examination of ages; the answer which every member of the established church may confidently give to the infidel question—"what profit shall we have from prayer?" is this: that upon the mere footing of natural reason, it has an evident necessary tendency to make us more virtuous and better men in every relation and office of life; and, consequently, to render us fitter objects of the Divine goodness and bounty,

And

And from this consideration, we may not only abundantly vindicate the honour of the sacred scriptures, which enjoin so holy an exercise—so entirely suitable to the moral and rational nature of man—but perceive infinite reason to admit the belief of all those miracles of its efficacy so solemnly recorded in them. They are no other than arguments from certain fact and experience of the truth of the Apostle's doctrine—that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much: consequently, all arguments against it, founded on the *immutability* of the Divine Nature, are, upon every principle of fair reasoning, both impertinent and absurd.

The appeal is to plain historical facts, demonstrating beyond the possibility of rational doubt, that men in all ages of the world have, by conscientious, rational prayer, obtained many valuable privileges and favours, both of body and soul—many comforts and supports in sickness, adversity, and distress. And it is not to be doubted

SERM.
XXII.

SERM.
XXII.

doubted but the personal experience of several, even in the present congregation, might be adduced to add new force to this already irresistible evidence. The reasonings from the unchangeableness of the Divine Nature, therefore, however confidently urged, may be fairly treated, in this instance, like all other *priori* arguments (as they are called) when opposed to certain well-attested matters of facts; as the best, though hopeless efforts of men, retained in a desperate cause, who contend for victory instead of truth.

But what if it should appear that this very attribute of *immutability* introduced to testify against us, should, after all, give evidence in favour of the devout religionist, then must our opponents be regarded not merely as fallible, but fallacious reasoners—entitled at once to our pity and abhorrence.

The universal infinite importance of the subject must be my apology, for going a little out of the common road to meet their

their objections, and fix this great anchor of the soul of man in the eternal base of reason and truth. SERM.
XXII.

We readily acknowledge and admit, that God knoweth every want of his creatures without our information—that he is disposed to *relieve* them (without being wearied into compassion by our importunity) if it be suitable to the harmony of the Divine Attributes:—that otherwise his counsels are immutable. Yet as it has been proved that our rational prayers have a *moral* influence and effect upon ourselves, they have a natural tendency to render us proper objects of the Divine favour, which otherwise, perhaps, we might never have been. We do not, therefore, in these cases, presume to petition God to change his mind (as hath been maliciously insinuated) but we pray that we may attain those qualifications, which, according to his immutable purpose, are the indispensable conditions of his favour. When, therefore, we thus

SERM.

XXII.

obtain blessings which we did not enjoy before, the single question is—where is the change or alteration? Every man of common sense must immediately answer, not in God, but in ourselves. His design was always one and the same—to receive, to hear, and assist such as come to him with sincerity of heart, with humble confession of mouth, and with suitable holiness of life. Well then—these are the terms on which his favours are to be bestowed. And when we have fulfilled them, when the desire of obedience has led us to devotion, and devotion has excited us to, and confirmed us in virtue; then may we (through the merits of a crucified Redeemer) come boldly unto the throne of Grace, and upon every principle of reason, expect to find grace to help in time of need. God, you see, is still the same; but we ourselves are now become *different* persons; and by devotion and reformation are converted into objects of his favour.

The

The Divine goodness and wisdom did, from all eternity, propose the acceptance of returning sinners, who should apply for mercy in the method of *true prayer*, an instrument most happily adapted to form in them such a temper as should make them meet to be partakers of the love of an all-perfect Being. And whenever such persons are blessed with advantages, of which they were before destitute, the Divine purpose—so far from being altered—is, on the contrary, evidently confirmed, perfected, and completed.

SERM.
XXII.

Indeed, if the liturgy of our church like that of the Romanists, were absurdly composed in a language not understood by the people; so that our duty was not legible in our devotions; it might still remain a doubt whether prayer had in itself any considerable influence in rendering us fit objects of the Divine favour. But as this is not the case; neither are we left to

SERM.
XXII.

the incompetent admonition of extemporaneous addresses ; every member of our own church is demonstrably obliged—as he would not be thought stupidly blind to his own highest interests to be both frequent and fervent in the use of those most excellent prayers, so wisely and so charitably provided for him. They are glorious instruments in his hands—if properly applied—that is, with sincerity and understanding—of his immediate satisfaction and happiness; the universal comfort in adversity, and our dearest privilege in prosperity: they admit us to an holy intercourse and familiarity with Omnipotence, bring us to a resemblance of the Divine perfections, restoring the genuine dignity of human nature: they render effectual all that our blessed Redeemer did and suffered for us, give us an antepast of heaven, even here, in the vale of affliction, and secure us an eternal residence in it hereafter.

My

My brethren and fellow-christians, if SERM.
XXII.
this be the true character of rational prayer and the exercise of it be thus bound down upon us *by the cords of a man*—by reason, his own moral nature, the eternal constitution of things, and the revealed will of his Creator; what must be our sentiments of those who are not ashamed to offer the most trifling excuses for their continual neglect of it, both in publick and in private? or, which is almost as bad, seeking for edification from the prayers of sectarists and dissenters, who have no prayer-book for themselves:—excuses which they themselves would think an insult on common sense, if attempted in any ordinary engagement of life. Nay, it is not uncommon to find men even arrogating veneration for superior wisdom and sagacity, because they seldom or never frequent the house of prayer; but live and act as if it were the criterion of a refined understanding to regard every religious

P 2

exercise

SERM.
XXII.

exercise as superstitious and indefensible upon the principles of reason and philosophy. To expose the contemptible nothingness of their pretensions has been the business of this discourse; and if you are now rationally convinced that publick prayer, from an established national liturgy, is our most indispensable duty, our most glorious privilege, both as men and as Christians, I call upon you, in the name of GOD; I exhort you for JESUS CHRIST'S sake—I conjure you by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, and by his precious death—by the sincerity of your love for your own immortal souls—to evidence this conviction by your future conscientious attendance on the stated seasons of devotion. But whether ye will hear, or whether ye will forbear, and still proceed in slighting your religious duties whenever any worldly business or pleasure shall solicit your attention; GOD forbid that I should sin against the LORD, in ceasing to pray for you.

That

That the eyes of your understanding being farther enlightened, and your will sanctified by the abundant grace of God, you may be convinced of the vanity of this world, before you are incapable of qualifying yourselves for a better.

SERM.
XXII.

Now to God the Father, &c.

That the eyes of your understanding
 may be further enlightened, and your
 will quickened by the abundant grace of
 God, that you may be convinced of the vanity
 of this world, before you are incapable
 of distinguishing your true interest.

1

S E R M O N XXIII.

THE CASE OF HEROD:

OR,

THE DUTY OF GLORIFYING GOD,
EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

THE CASE OF HEROD

THE CASE OF HEROD

THE CASE OF HEROD

S E R M O N XXIII.

And immediately the Angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Acts, xii. 23.

WE have here an instance of Divine vengeance so very awful and interesting, that I am persuaded the examination of it cannot fail to engage your particular attention. The mournful subject of it was no less a person than Herod Agrippa, king of Judea, grandson of Herod the Great; and father of that Agrippa, from whom the prevailing eloquence of St. Paul extorted a confession which must reflect eternal honour on the religion of **JESUS CHRIST.**

SERM.
XXIII.

The

SERM.
XXIII.

The elegant simplicity with which the sacred writer has recorded this alarming incident is almost as remarkable as his subject.

“ Upon a set day (says he) Herod, arrayed in Royal apparel, set upon his throne, and made an oration to his subjects. And the people gave a shout—the voice of a *God!* and not of a man! and immediately the angel of the LORD smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”

It may perhaps, serve to illustrate the text, and increase your faith, to hear the affecting catastrophe of this haughty Prince, as recorded by a contemporary historian. Josephus tells us that in the fourth year of his reign, he went to Cæſarea to exhibit publick shews, in honour of Claudius Cæſar. To assist at these solemnities, resorted an incredible multitude not only of the common people, but of all that excelled in honour and dignity
6 throughout

throughout the whole province. Early in the morning of the 2d day of these splendid exhibitions, Herod entered the theatre, apparelled in the most magnificent robes a luxuriant imagination could invent—entirely covered over with the purest silver. These, glittering with the beams of the rising sun, had so glorious and striking an effect on all who beheld, that some of his flatterers seized that opportunity of ingratiating themselves, by proclaiming him a *God*; and immediately proceeded so far in their impious design, as actually to offer up vows and *prayers* to him. To this it seems, the King shewed not the least sign of aversion—never so much as once *rebuking* them, or disclaiming their most horrid and blasphemous adulation. But in a few moments, he was awakened from his infatuating dream of immortality, by an insufferable pain, which instantly shot through his heart, and shewed itself in convulsive agonies over his whole body. Under this excruciating torture,

SERM.
XXIII.

torture, he languished for five days, and then miserably ended his life.

This admirable harmony between sacred writ and civil history, must afford a particular satisfaction to every serious well-disposed Christian. And it must, at the same time, demonstrate to all, the ingenuous spirit of the holy penmen, not to be induced by any temptation whatsoever, even to misrepresent, much less to *falsify* those occurrences which they undertook to record.

This king had encouraged a violent persecution against the church, had just murdered that eminent servant of JESUS CHRIST, James, the brother of John; and would have consigned St. Peter to the same fate, had not the Divine Providence miraculously interposed for *his* preservation. When therefore, he himself presently afterwards came to so miserable an end, what a temptation must this have been to enthusiasts and designing men to represent his sudden death as a *judgement* inflicted

inflicted on him for his bloody cruelty to their dear friends and companions?

SERM.
XXIII.

If integrity incorruptible, a sacred devotedness to truth and truth alone, had not been their regulating principle—the inviolable rule of their conversation and writings; what powerful arguments might they have drawn in favour of their own system, from this immediate interposition of God himself? But not so the sacred historian. He expressly tells us Herod was struck with death (not to revenge the murder of his friend, or to strike terror into those who were enemies to the gospel, but) because he suffered himself to be exalted to the dishonour of the true God, and impiously neglected such an opportunity of advancing the Divine glory. “The Angel of the Lord smote him, (says he) because he gave not God the glory:” or, as it may be translated, because he gave not glory to God.

Brethren, we are expressly taught that we were all of us not only created at first,
but

SERM.

XXIII.

but afterwards *redeemed*, and bought with a price, for this very purpose—that both in our body and in our spirit we might *glorify* God. What punishment, then, both here and hereafter must be reserved for those, who professing and calling themselves Christians, nevertheless suffer their whole souls and affections to be absorbed by the world, and who presume to live in the habitual neglect or violation of it? God is no respecter of persons. And after what you have heard in the case of Herod, and know of the *impartiality* of divine justice, you will allow this to be a very interesting and important question, worthy your most serious and attentive consideration.

I shall therefore employ the remainder of the time, you will be pleased at present to indulge me, in examining before you in the plainest manner wherein this great and necessary duty consists.

But permit me first, earnestly to exhort every one of you, in particular, to ask
your

your own souls, at every period of this enquiry, how far yourselves have fulfilled or neglected that part of the duty, then offered to your consideration. And may God assist both you and me in this, and all other wise and necessary self-examinations! Indeed, whenever we speak of, or even lift up a thought to the great author of our being, with hope, reverence, or love, we are in the actual discharge of this duty. Because such habits imply an acknowledgement of the transcendent excellence of his nature and attributes—that he is the great fountain of wisdom, goodness, and power. It is an evidence of our faith in his promises, that we believe he has an affection for us, and is both able and willing to preserve and assist us. Nay, even engaged in the business of our temporal trades and professions, whoever has established it as the unalterable rule of his dealings, to take no improper advantages of any one, and that for *conscience-sake*, towards God, but to refer all their successes

SERM.
XXII.

S E R M.

XXIII.

cesses to him, has wisely learned to sanctify his daily labours, and exalt them into a mean of glorifying God.

Hence it is, we are commanded, not only in our exercises professedly religious, but even in the most indifferent actions of our lives to have a regard to this universal duty. “Whether ye eat, or drink (says the Apostle of CHRIST) or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God:” plainly intimating that the meanest occurrences are capable of being directed to that end. It certainly concerns such among us to think of this positive injunction, who are declined into that unchristian, or, rather, unmanly—that worse than heathenish custom of brutishly sitting down to the good creatures of God, without one ejaculation for his blessing before, or of thanksgiving after meat.

But of all the means of discharging this general duty, the most immediate and effectual is the solemn celebration of publick worship. And hence it was that the
 Psalmist

Psalmist so devoutly wished “that men
“would praise the LORD for his goodness,
“and declare the wonders that he doeth
“for the children of men, exalting, or
“glorifying him, in the congregation of
“the people.” Because we have here the
properest opportunity we possibly can, of
keeping up a due sense of God in the
world—of reminding both ourselves and
others of his sovereignty and power, and
our own absolute dependence on him
throughout every article of our existence.
“Let your light shine before men.”—It
is the injunction of CHRIST himself—that
is, let your truly wise regard for religion
be *publickly manifested*, “that they may
“see your good works,” or dispositions,
and be induced by your example to “glo-
“rify your Father, who is in heaven.”

S E R M.
XXIII.

The great attention paid to the actual
discharge of this duty, by the compilers
of our own excellent liturgy, must be ob-
vious to every man, who reflects on those
various hymns of praise and thanksgiving

SERM.
XXIII.

so judiciously dispersed throughout the whole service. No sooner is the absolution pronounced, and we are thereby rendered *fit* for celebrating the Divine perfections, than we are encouraged "to sing "unto the LORD, and heartily to rejoice "in the strength of our salvation." Immediately after the *first* lesson, we are taught to resume the heart-ennobling subject, and in an hymn of divine rapture, to cry out in alternate strains, "we praise "thee, O GOD! we acknowledge thee to "be the LORD!"

The *Jubilate* following the second lesson is still but a continuation of this most rational and necessary part of devotion. To all which if we add the repetition of that ancient doxology, "glory be to the Father, "and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;" and when the Communion is celebrated, the introduction of those awful words, "therefore with angels, and arch-angels, "and with all the company of heaven, we "laud and magnify thy glorious name;" and

and above all that divine composition, SERM.
XXII.
"glory be to God on high:" whoever, I say, bestows a serious thought on this economy of the church, will immediately discover her earnest solicitude to provide proper materials to kindle and keep up within us the sacred fire of admiration, gratitude, and love. And therefore it is that those persons who make no scruple to absent themselves from the publick congregation, have ever been regarded either as deplorably ignorant, or the enemies of themselves, their fellow-creatures, and of their God. It is actually to oppose *Him*, in that which we have reason to believe has been, and will continue the chief scheme of his providence, throughout the whole compass of eternity. He created the stupendous and beautiful fabrick of the universe—the world, mankind, and the angels, that he himself being visible in his works, might be universally acknowledged and glorified. All the varied modes of animated existence—

manud

Q 2

nay,

SERM.
XXIII.

nay, the meanest parts of inanimate creation, were ordained, as well as the heavens themselves, to declare the glory of God. To be *glorified*, he delivered the law to mankind; to repair that image of his own infinite perfections, which was almost effaced from the human soul, by the defection of our first parents. To be *glorified*, he commissioned his servants the prophets farther to declare his holy will and purposes by successive revelations. To be *glorified*, he sent his own dear Son into the world; proving thereby his infinite love towards mankind, and his infallible truth in accomplishing the promises: letting us understand his irreconcilable aversion to every species of unrighteousness, in that he permitted his beloved Son to suffer a painful and ignominious death, rather than sin should escape with impunity; having manifested his wisdom, by inventing the means of reconciling his mercy to his justice, and demonstrated his omnipotence, in making the infirmity of human

human nature available even to the subver-
sion of the kingdom of hell. And, in
the last day, he will again send forth his
Son to judge both the quick and the dead,
that his justice may be universally ac-
knowledge, the love which he bears for
his elect, the dominion which he hath
given to his Son over all things; and that
the whole intelligent creation may there-
fore, with one mind, and one mouth,
glorify God, "even the Father of our
"LORD JESUS CHRIST."

SERM.
XXIII.

Not, we may easily believe, that the
all-perfect Being could have any want of
our ineffectual adoration and praise: or,
that our sublimest hallelujahs can add one
iota to his happiness. "His name (says
"the Prophet) is exalted above all blessing
"and praise." Yes! before the founda-
tions of the world were laid, or ever the
morning stars sang together, and the sons
of God shouted for joy, He, in the calm
contemplation of his own infinite perfec-
tions, enjoyed an inexhaustible fund of

Q3

felicity,

SERM.
XXIII.

felicity, as incapable of access as of diminution. Creation was merely the offspring of incomprehensible goodness and love. He called us into existence out of the womb of nothing, only that he might have fit objects to communicate some portion of his own happiness to. And so far are we from being *able* to praise him, according to his excellent greatness—to ascribe unto the LORD the honour due unto his name—that our most exalted and rapturous adoration falls infinitely beneath the dignity of their subject. But still it is his blessed pleasure, that even we lowly children of the dust should exert our best endeavours towards discharging this important duty. And why? O miracle of mercy and love! because all the emotions of sacred gratitude have a necessary tendency to improve our *own* nature. Because our frequent practice of praising and glorifying his incomparable wisdom, goodness and power in the great congregation will insensibly bring over others to the acknowledgement

ledgement of the great source from which all that they have and are is derived; and because, above all, it will so refine and exalt our own hearts, that they will be open to every operation of the Holy Spirit, and by degrees approach as nearly to that perfection, wherewith our Heavenly Father himself is perfect, as the condition of our nature is capable of.

SERM.
XXIII.

That praise and thanksgiving are the principal branches of this duty may be clearly evinced, as from a variety of other passages, so particularly from the 25th verse of the 5th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, where we are told, that when CHRIST had miraculously healed the man that was sick of a palsy, he departed to his own house, *glorifying* God:—that is, beyond a doubt, returning thanks for his amazing recovery. Nay, the Psalmist has introduced the Supreme Being himself not only enjoining the duty now under consideration, but expressly telling us in what it consists:—“whofo offereth me

Q 4

“praise

SERM.
XXIII.

“*praise* (says he, at the 25th verse of the
“50th Psalm) he *glorifieth* me.”

Here then let us pause a while to admire and adore the infinite condescension of God in that he is pleased to regard a duty so sweet and easy in the performance, and which manifestly tends to our own advantage, and that of our fellow-creatures only, as an immediate act of honour to himself. “O that men would therefore “praise the LORD for his goodness at “least, and declare the wonders that he “doeth for the children of men! that they “would offer to him the sacrifice of “thanksgiving, and tell out his works “with gladness!”

But besides this *general* way, there are many other particular acts by which we may glorify God: as *first*, when we are religiously careful never to use that name, which is great, wonderful, and holy, in prophane oaths and curses, or on any trivial occasion whatsoever; but habitually endeavour, when we are obliged to men-
tion

tion it, to do it with that holy reverence and awe, which are due from the creature to his Creator. The ancient people were so solicitously attentive to this duty, that they called the name peculiarly appropriated to the Most High, the *unspeakable* word: and scrupled to pronounce it even when reading the scriptures. Nay, our own histories furnish us with an anecdote of a person of great honour and eminence, who was never known in his whole life, to mention the name of God without a solemn pause in his conversation, and some other expressive tokens of reverence and devotion.

SERM.
XXIII.

Secondly, another method of glorifying God, is to establish it as the unalterable rule of our conversation to speak only the language of sincerity and truth; and industriously avoid, as in the Divine presence, every species of falsehood, misrepresentation, and hypocrisy. "Joshua said unto
" Achan,

SERM. XXIII. *“Achan, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD GOD;”* *how*, he immediately tells him—*“and make (says he) confession unto him, and tell me now what thou hast done, hide it not from me.”* A deficiency in this duty is a kind of practical Atheism.

Thirdly, we glorify God by discouraging to the utmost of our power the insinuations of infidelity and irreligion, a duty which, at the present day, demands our courage, diligence, and zeal to their utmost exertion:—studying and hearing the scriptures with the profoundest reverence, as an infallible revelation of his holy will, faithfully trusting to, and expecting the accomplishment of all his promises. Hence it is, that we read of Abraham, in the 4th chapter to the Romans, that *“he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded,*

"*persuaded, that what he had promised*
"*he was able also to perform.*"

SERM.
XXIII.

Fourthly, we do, in the most signal manner, advance the glory of God, whenever, for his sake, we resist any pressing temptation to sin—transcribe into our own practice the examples of the primitive heroes of religion, and adorn our lives with the acceptable works of morality and virtue. And, therefore, St. Peter advising us to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, and to have our conversation honest," or exemplary, subjoins this reason—"that they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

In the fifth, and last place, we glorify God by casting down all high opinions of our own wisdom, importance, and dignity, and by cloathing ourselves in that
4 garment

SER. M.
XXIII.

garment so peculiarly becoming every child of offending Adam—the robe of *humility*. Nothing is so utterly inconsistent with this duty as indulging lofty notions of ourselves. If pride was productive of rebellion among the inhabitants of *heaven*, what wonder if it should seduce *us* weak children of vanity from our allegiance, and teach us, with the haughty King of Egypt, to say, “who is the LORD!”

But O! let it be our constant preservative against all such thoughts, equally weak and wicked, to remember that there came a time when even the mighty Pharaoh, as well as the magnificent Herod, was fatally convinced of the universal supremacy of God: when, in despite of himself, he was signally instrumental in setting forth the glory of his almighty power and vengeance.

From what has been said, you will clearly perceive that by endeavouring to promote the glory of God, we most immediately

immediately and effectually advance our
own true interests both here and hereafter.

SERM.
XXIII.

It is impossible to glorify God by any thing which is in its nature repugnant to the rules of eternal virtue and truth. "The fruits of *righteousness* (the scripture expressly assures us) are the glory of God." All sin is a dishonour to him, a contempt of his authority and laws, and a contradiction to his attributes. Now, for every virtuous action, word, and thought of our lives, we know, and are sure there is a great and eternal reward reserved for us: whenever, therefore, we are exhorted to give glory to the LORD our GOD, as our highest and most acceptable religious duty, we are, in effect, only commanded to love ourselves, and be for ever happy. "We thank thee, O Father, LORD of heaven and earth, for this most endearing instance of thy mercy and condescension to our infirmities!"

But if, after all, we can be so far lost to every sentiment of religion, gratitude,
common

SERM.
XXIII.

common justice, and, I may add, of even rational self-love; if we can be so *brutishly* abandoned as to spend our whole lives in miserable drudgery to the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world; without paying this small and reasonable tribute—the only acknowledgement our great Benefactor expects for his innumerable—inestimable blessings; how shall we indulge a hope that he will not inflict on *us also* the utmost severity of his wrath? If we still obstinately refuse to be employed as heralds of his glory—after being redeemed and bought with the price of CHRIST'S most precious blood for that very purpose, what can we expect but to become monuments of his justice? That since GOD could not be glorified *by* us, he may be glorified *in* us. For as that was his great design in calling every man into existence, it shall, most certainly, either to our eternal happiness or confusion, be universally accomplished. “The LORD (says Solomon)

“man hath made all things for himself—
“or for his own glory—yea even the
“wicked in the day of evil.”

SERM.
XXIII.

Behold then the deplorable folly—the
unspeakable stupidity, of a life of irre-
ligion! They who are addicted to it can
be regarded in no other light than that of
voluntary candidates for eternal infamy and
perdition!

Permit me to add another motive to this
great duty, and I have done: it is this;
as giving glory to God is the highest duty
of the man and the Christian here, so will
it be the chief employment of the saint
hereafter. And could we bring ourselves
to suppose a possibility that any should be
admitted to the seats of blessedness, who
has been notoriously deficient in the dis-
charge of it—has lived only to the plea-
sures and interests of this world; to such
a one heaven itself would be no heaven
at all. If those sublime employments of
praising and glorifying God, which con-
stitute

SERM.
XXIII.

stitute its chief happiness, are now so irksome and unpleasant to us, can we imagine that our souls and all their affections can be so far changed in a moment as to acquire that exquisite relish for them, which is necessary to render us perfectly satisfied? No; in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for ever more; even there the irreligious man would pine and languish—be confounded, unhappy, distressed. Heaven has no objects to gratify the passions of the sensualist. It is a great truth, on which we should keep our eyes constantly fixed, that although our capacity for happiness shall be *perfected* in heaven, yet must it of necessity, be *begun* here upon earth. He that, at the close of this scene of probation is found unjust shall be unjust still, and he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and, therefore, utterly incapable of heavenly happiness to all eternity.

Dear

Dear Christians, may you and I seriously
lay these things to heart, and learn to live
every day, more and more to the glory of
God; at least for the increas^{ing} of our
own personal joy and endless felicity.

SERM.
XXII.

Amen, O God, for JESUS CHRIST'S
sake.

Dear Christian, may God bless thee
in thy things to him who is to live
every day, and mine to the glory of
God, as well for the increasing of our
own nation, as for the benefit of others.

Amos, O God, for Jesus Christ

S E R M O N XXIV.

THE CHAIN OF SIN;

OR,

THE MARTYRDOM OF St. JOHN
THE BAPTIST.

SERMON XXIV

THE CHAIN OF SIN

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. JOHN

THE BAPTIST

S E R M O N XXIV.

*And immediately the King sent an executioner
and commanded his head to be brought.*

*And he went, and beheaded him in prison,
and brought his head in a charger, and
gave it to the damsel; and the damsel
gave it to her mother.*

Mark, vi. 27 & 28.

THERE is a circumstance or qua- SERM.
XXIV.
lity in the very *abstract* nature of
vice, which, without any regard to its
eternal consequences, may be thought,
in the cool unimpassioned hours of specu-
lation, too terrifying to permit any of its
blandishments, however specious and al-
luring, to obtain much effect on a rea-
sonable creature.

SERM.
XXIV.

“ When Lust hath conceived (saith the
“ holy Apostle of JESUS CHRIST) it
“ bringeth forth Sin, and Sin, when it is
“ finished, bringeth forth Death. Do
“ not err, my beloved brethren.” As if
he had said, dear Christians, there is a
momentous caution, which I most ar-
dently wish to engrave on the living ta-
blet of your hearts: you may, perhaps,
imagine, that although you should, in
the unhappy season of temptation, yield
yourselves up to the indulgence of one
criminal passion; you may, nevertheless,
preserve your integrity, in other instances,
and even proceed to the practice of many
exalted virtues. Now, this is a most de-
plorable delusion, arising from your ig-
norance not only of your own nature, but
of the nature of vice:—“ Sin, when it
“ is *finished*,” or having passed through its
intermediate stages, to its last state of per-
fection, “ bringeth forth death.” Plainly
intimating, that there is no such thing as a
single and unconnected sin; but that any
one

one whatsoever, once indulged, naturally introduces another, and that a third, and so on, with a kind of necessary and mechanical progress, towards perfection; till at last, both soul and body are gradually and almost insensibly corrupted, to such a degree, as to be ripe for condemnation and death.

SERM.
XXIV.

To this alarming concatenation the prophet Isaiah seems to allude in those remarkable words, “Woe unto them that *draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin, as it were with a cart-rope:*”—that is, by their progressive immorality, produce sin after sin, to the astonishment and scandal of the world, as if they were tied or connected together by some secret, indissoluble union.

“What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do these great things?” would be the indignant expostulation of every one who should be stopped in his first deviation from duty, and obliged to hear those enormities recounted before him, which,

SERM.
XXIV.

it is more than probable, he will afterwards perpetrate without horror.

The great moral lesson to be deduced from these reflexions is this; that no one can be secure of holding fast his integrity in *any* instance, who is not habitually resolved to maintain it in *all*. Many a poor miserable creature, who has reaped the harvest of sin at the gallows, has thought himself able to trace it back with certainty to his first sowing the seed in sabbath-breaking:—sabbath-breaking! pregnant with universal impiety, infamy, and death, and yet committed, at the present day, by high and low, rich and poor, with a little scruple and remorse of conscience as if their souls were only worth caring for when they had nothing else to do.

Every sin, in its very nature, as it is a direct contradiction to the Divine Attributes, evidently implies a contempt of, or, at least, a disregard to the authority of God; an awful regard to which, a very short history of our own profligate manners

manners would demonstrate to be the only preservative of virtue, that deserves any confidence. But if this principle be wanting, or, from irreligious habits, so weak as to be insufficient to restrain us from sacrificing the honour of our Creator, Preserver, and future Judge, to the indulgence of *one* of our criminal appetites; what good reason can there possibly be to expect it should be effectual in another? Now, when our abstinence from a particular vice does not proceed from a sense of the Divine Majesty, but from the absence of temptation; our negative virtue evidently depends upon no stronger foundation than mere chance and accident. In such a defenceless state of mind, therefore, the heart is prepared for every vice, to which occasion or opportunity may solicit it: of consequence there can be no guard against any sin, but by disclaiming all. Because the original source of all—contempt of Divine Authority—is one and the same. All vices, therefore, being effects of the same

SERM.
XXIV.

SERM.
XXIV.

same cause, are too nearly allied to each other to be long separated; but where one gains a fixed and settled possession, it will throw open every avenue of the soul for the admission of the rest. He that over-values money, or himself upon getting and keeping it, will generally be found of a base and groveling spirit, low in morals and understanding, incapable of friendship and charity, and habitually disposed to sacrifice the eternal obligations of equity, honour, truth, justice, and religion, whenever he can either get or save, any thing in the course of his dealings. But look into our *Eastern* connections:—is there any villainy that can dishonour God, or disgrace human nature, that is not now deliberately practised by those, who at first set out with saying “to gold, thou art
“my hope, and to the fine gold, thou art
“my confidence!” Perhaps there never was a man who feared poverty more than he loved virtue, or the applause of conscience, who, on this basis of foolishness,
did

did not as regularly accumulate sin upon sin, as gain upon gain; so that he might have known his progressive wickedness by the gradual increase of his fortune.

SERM.
XXIV.

Indeed this most interesting doctrine might be illustrated and exemplified by a short investigation of almost every irregular passion and pursuit of men; but the words of my text, which record the mournful death of St. John the Baptist, supply us with evidence from plain matter of fact, with proof unexceptionable and demonstrative, with respect to the conduct of the *other sex*; with whom chastity, for instance, is but another name for *virtue* in general; as the want of it almost always infers universal profligacy.

Yes! that retiring modesty and delicate sensibility of spirit, which God and nature have given them as their peculiar and most engaging ornament, is certainly the great link on which every other virtue depends; the advanced guard, which, by a kind of instinctive impulse, gives an immediate
alarm

SERM.
XXIV.

alarm on the very first approach of danger: in the elegant language of scripture, “it
“is like the tower of David, builded for
“an armoury, whereon there hang a thou-
“sand bucklers, all shields of mighty
“men”—of temper to quench the fiery
darts of the wicked—“beautiful as Tirza,
“comely as Jerusalem, and,”—to the most
daring enemies of innocence—“terrible
“as an army with banners,”—infusing re-
verence and respect into every bosom.—
And is it any wonder, when this celestial
panoply is entirely rejected, that the de-
fenseless heart is exposed to every incursion
of the tempter? if he, taking to himself
seven other spirits, should enter in, and
dwell there; till whatsoever things are
honest and venerable, whatsoever things
are just and honourable, whatsoever things
are amiable, whatsoever things are of good
report, in short, all that is virtuous and
praise-worthy in human nature is driven
out, and its place supplied by every mon-
ster

ster of wickedness that can render it detestable.

SERM.
XXIV.

When *Herodias*, the wife of Philip, first indulged a criminal passion for her husband's brother, it is hardly probable that she herself was aware in what a chain of sins she, from that moment, began to involve her devoted soul. Every step we follow her in her deviation from duty seems with more deep and solemn tone to re-iterate the prophet's admonition: "Keep thy *heart* with all diligence," or, above all keeping, "for out of it are the issues of *life and death!*"

"Thus far will I go, and no farther," is the language of presumption and folly, in the mouth of a creature, who has already placed herself on the edge of a precipice, and has strengthened her natural gravitation to evil, by contemplating, with desire, the delusive pleasures which solicit her below.

If we have, therefore, any reverence for God, if we have any real love of virtue, happiness, or character; we must resist
the

SERM.
XXIV.

the *beginnings* of vice, and crush the serpent in its egg; lest, while we are indulging it for our amusement, it insensibly acquire a strength and venom which may be fatal to our souls.

The remonstrances of reason and religion were soon baffled and silenced, when her will was corrupted: she forsook the house and protection of her husband, and publicly delivered herself up to a criminal conversation with his brother. Here a whole legion of devils took possession of her at once, and ran violently with her down the steep place of infamy and perdition. Even unchastity is so evidently contrary to the nature and reason of things, has so necessary a tendency to degrade a reasonable creature, in her original state but little lower than the angels, to a level with the brute beasts, that have no understanding—to extinguish every spark of grace; that the Spirit of God has ranked it among those crimes, which, without special repentance, must seal us up to inexorable

orable vengeance for ever. But *adultery*, SERM.
XXIV.
beyond all the mighty and unanswerable reasons, which are alledged against the other—*adultery* has this peculiar to it; that as it implies a violation of the last most sacred engagements that can bind the soul, entered into with an appeal to an omniscient and all-powerful God, is an evidence of such detestable impiety—such an open defiance of all authority, human and divine, pregnant with such insufferable evils to society, that we cannot be surprised to find all mankind unanimous in their suffrage against it.

But the most enflaming article of this wretched creature's impurity is still unmentioned:—she was guilty with the brother of her own *husband*: her adultery, therefore, was unspeakably heighthened and aggravated by *incest*! a crime, at the bare mention of which human nature is appalled, and starts back.

God of our being! what sin is there, which we are incapable of committing, when

SERM.
XXIV.

when once we have wilfully withdrawn ourselves from the influence of thy spirit? Can any promiscuously incontinent ever be sure, that in the walk of defilement, he may not have been led, even beyond his own intention, into similar enormities? And yet, it is an alarming circumstance attending the case, that this very uncertainty renders a particular repentance *impracticable*; at the same time as all the guilt of it stands charged against our souls.

Every step we advance in the history, the same great lesson meets us; be innocent—be resolutely universally innocent, and you are safe; for the violation of duty, in one single instance, naturally prepares and disposes the heart for the violation of it in all.

The wife of Philip, however, had not even this miserable subterfuge of *ignorance*; the moment she had, in her own mind, *consented* to the motions of concupiscence, and formed the resolution of leaving her husband, for its gratification; perjury,

perjury, adultery, and incest stared her in the face; they were deliberately chosen as the attendants of her flight, and the inseparable companions of all the rest of her days. So true is that alarming doctrine of our blessed SAVIOUR, that “out of the heart,”—once corrupted—“proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”—“Keep thy heart, therefore, with all diligence;” watch over its emotions with restless jealousy and solicitude, can never be too often repeated. There are but two links more in the chain of sin conceivable in her situation, and the sequel will show us—would to God the warning may obtain its proper effect! that she, at last, submitted to both.

It appears that Herod, not long before his infamous connexion with her, had admitted John the Baptist to his acquaintance. St. Mark tells us that he *feared*, or had a great respect for John, convinced that he was a just man and a holy: that he

SERM.
XXIV.

observed him, or, as the original rather imports, assigned him a place of safety, probably contiguous to his own palace, where the malice of his enemies could not reach, and where he often indulged himself in hearkening to his sublime discourses, “and when he heard him, he did many things according to his advice, and always heard him gladly.” The good man availed himself of one of these conferences to mention his dreadful commerce with the wife of his own brother; and conjured him to part with her immediately, plainly telling him, with a manly freedom, every way becoming his character and duty, that “it was not lawful for him to have her.” Some time after this, when the king’s birth-day was celebrated, and some degree of intemperance, which he had, on that occasion, indulged, seems to have thrown him off his guard; the abominable woman introduced her own daughter to the scene of riot, who, as the text briefly speaks, *danced* before him, and
pleased

pleased Herod. The learned commentators observe that something indecent is implied in the Greek words here translated, "danced and pleased Herod." See then a mother educating her own daughter in the arts of prostitution! and then consider, what must be the accursed malignity of that sin, which could influence a creature whose innate characteristicks were modesty and tenderness not only publickly to renounce the former, but even to annihilate the common animal principle of natural affection.

SERM.
XXIV.

Herod, by this time, reduced to a state of infatuation—as if eager to distinguish himself, by some stroke of heroick gallantry—"promised, with an oath, to give "the damsel whatsoever she should ask, "even to the half of his kingdom."

This was the fatal moment of compliance, which she had watched for: her malice against the Baptist, for his conscientious interposition, had been treasured up in her heart for such an opportunity.

SERM.
XXIV.

“Herodias (says the sacred text) had a quarrel against him”—bore him an implacable grudge, and thirsted for revenge. And is not this another common effect of wickedness, to regard even the most benevolent advice as an injury and an insult? yes; this plague-sore in the heart always affects the head. The subjects of it cannot but know and feel they are posting headlong to infamy and perdition, and yet are ready to tear in pieces the hand which is extended to save them. “Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a *sensual* fool in his folly.” But to proceed, the damsel, instructed by her mother, cried, “Give me here the head of John the Baptist in a charger!” Herod himself, even in that season of riot, was shocked—was astonished at the prodigious wickedness of the demand: St. Matthew tells us, “the king was *sorry*,” “*exceeding sorry*” says St. Mark. But it seems, he had, unawares, engaged himself too far to retract with honour—a man of honour

honour being almost as foolish and flagitious a character then, as it is at the present day. An executioner, therefore, was immediately despatched; the blessed venerable servant of JESUS CHRIST was martyred for the gratification of an adulteress; and when his head was produced in the assembly, she publicly accepted it, as if glorying in the omnipotence of her wickedness. Nay, the fire of her malice was not to be quenched by the effusion of his vital blood; for, if we may believe the most credible tradition, the monster contrived, even after his death, to tear open his mouth, and violate the honest tongue which had given testimony against her infamous connexion. Well might the holy Apostle so vehemently exclaim, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

And shall we now tax the world with exercising too rigid a severity against the first forfeiture of female innocence; con-

SERM.
XXIV.

vinced, that without an almost miraculous interposition, its natural consequences are universal profligacy. We have seen perjury, uncleanness, adultery, incest, corruption of an own child, and even premeditated *murder* itself, walking in the train of the incontinent. Happy they, who shall by any means, be stopped in their downhill walk of death, before they arrive at this Stygian perfection of vice!

Children of sensuality! take now, I beseech you—they are the pathetick words of one of the Fathers of the Church—take, I conjure you, the severed head of St. John in your hands: contemplate awhile that poor, injured countenance—his meek eyes beaming with benevolence, extinguished by the clouds of death: see, ah! see the warm blood yet trickling down his innocent venerable face; each of you bear it to his retirement, and imagine that before your eyes you hear it uttering speech and saying, “the murderer of me was even such a one as thyself!”

Remember

Remember, you are not called to the examination of a trifling, or uninteresting character, bending, like yourselves, to every blast of temptation,—“a reed shaken with the wind:” but what are you invited to see? “a man cloathed in soft raiment,” foolishly laying out his care in adorning and pampering a poor corruptible body, while his immortal soul is neglected even to nakedness and famine? No; but what are you invited to see? “a prophet!” a glorious ambassador from the Most High God! “yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.” Hear his character from the Redeemer’s own mouth, “Verily, I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.” Such was the man, who fell a sacrifice, in the very flower of his age, to a worthless creature, “whose face was harder than a rock, and her heart as an adamant stone.” And I would to God that the history of our own country would permit

SERM.
XXIV.

S E R M.

XXIV.

us to believe that there are not, among the modern votaries of pleasure, many capable of the same wickedness.

And whenever the memory of the murdered saint shall be thus present to your minds, while the circumstances of his death are a warning, may those of his life be an example to you ! They are peculiarly suited to our state and condition in this age of sensual indulgence. In his earliest infancy, deprived of both father and mother, the friendless orphan retired from the allurements and temptations of the world, and resolutely practised all the austerities of self-denial, till he reduced his passions to the obedience of reason and religion. The coarsest diet—locusts, or a few roots, herbs, and wild honey, such as uncultivated nature produced, were the chief of his food, and the pure waters of heaven his drink ; his cloathing was nothing better than the poor, undrest skin of a beast, fastened with a leathern girdle

about his loins. He knew (and we have too many examples before our eyes every day to leave us any room to question his knowledge) that the dangers to which in early life we are all exposed, by the tyranny of sensual appetite, can never be properly guarded against, while we are surrounded by the votaries of pleasure, and our bodies luxuriously pampered and indulged. And if any thing like this be really necessary for the preservation of the innocent, judge yourselves how much more for the recovery of the guilty?—of those whose moral powers are already so deplorably weakened and impaired by actual vice. Here the peculiar doctrine of the Baptist is our only hope, “he preached the baptism of *repentance*, for the remission of sins.” “Bring forth, therefore, *fruits* meet for *repentance*.”—Let your repentance appear by that which is, indeed, the only unexceptionable evidence of it; an immediate, full, perfect, and permanent re-
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S. E. R. M.
XXIV.

SERM.
XXIV.

formation and amendment of life. There is no alternative; you must either give up your vices, or all pretensions to integrity, and all hopes of salvation. Every relapse utterly annihilates all your past repentance. For "if we *sin wilfully*, after we have "received the knowledge of the truth, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for "sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of "judgement and fiery indignation."

Rather may that, which was prophesied of the blessed martyr be confirmed to the heart of every one of us: "and thou child "shalt go before the face of the LORD to "prepare his ways; to give knowledge "of salvation unto his people, by the re- "mission of their sins, through the tender "mercy of our God; whereby the day- "spring from on high hath visited us, to "give light to them that sit in the horrible "darkness of sin, and in the shadow of "death; to guide our feet into the way "of *peace*,"—most sweet and comforta-
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ble peace with our own consciences, with our appeased God and loving REDEEMER here upon earth, and eternal peace and blessedness hereafter in heaven!

SERM.
XXIV.

We have now, with painful attention, traced the chain of vice through many of its strongest links; and, it is to be hoped, will never hereafter presume to say, "surely such an indulgence cannot corrupt my soul—is it not a little one?" convinced that an unconnected and independent sin is hardly conceivable.

It is, however, our mighty consolation to reflect, that by the unalterable constitution of things, there is a similar concatenation of the moral graces. And wherever but one of these exists in its genuine gospel perfection, it will naturally dispose the soul for the reception of the rest; so that, by a conscientious co-operation with the spirit of God, we may "go on from strength to strength; adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge,
" and

SERM.
XXIV.

“and to knowledge temperance, and to
“temperance patience, and to patience
“godliness, and to godliness brotherly
“kindness, and to brotherly kindness cha-
“rity,” or universal benevolence and rec-
titude of heart: till, in another clime,
more favourable to virtue, we grow “unto
“the perfect man, unto the measure of the
“stature of the fulness of CHRIST.”

“These shall be an ornament of grace
“unto thy head, and a chain of glory
“about thy neck;” even all that can im-
part a real dignity to thy nature.

“I beseech you, therefore, brethren,
“by the mercies of God, that you present
“your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, ac-
“ceptable unto God, which is your rea-
“sonable service; and be not conformed
“to this world, whose fashionable cha-
“racters are alienated from the life of
“duty and happiness, through the cor-
“ruption and blindness of their hearts,
“and who being past feeling the force of
“moral

“moral obligations, have given them-
“selves over unto lasciviousness, to work
“all uncleanness with greediness; glory-
“ing in their cowardice and shame: but
“put ye on the LORD JESUS CHRIST,
“and make not provision for the flesh to
“fulfil the lusts thereof.”

SERM.
XXIV.

And I pray God, that your whole spirit
and soul and body be preserved blameless
and undefiled unto the day of his glorious
appearing to judge the earth!

Amen and amen, for JESUS CHRIST'S
sake, our only Saviour and Redeemer.

"... moral obligations, have given them
"... lives over into his hands, to work
"... all manner of good, and to glorify
"... him in their conversion and sanctification;
"... but we on the other hand, have
"... and make no provision for the future;
"... shall the Judge thereof?"

And I pray God, that your whole soul
and soul and body be preserved blameless
and delivered into the day of his glorious
appearing to judge the world.

Amen and amen, to Jesus Christ,
the only Saviour and Redeemer;
who is the author of our redemption,
who is the author of our life,
who is the author of our salvation,
who is the author of our glory,
who is the author of our happiness,
who is the author of our peace,
who is the author of our joy,
who is the author of our hope,
who is the author of our faith,
who is the author of our love,
who is the author of our charity,
who is the author of our wisdom,
who is the author of our strength,
who is the author of our power,
who is the author of our might,
who is the author of our dominion,
who is the author of our glory,
who is the author of our honour,
who is the author of our praise,
who is the author of our fame,
who is the author of our reputation,
who is the author of our credit,
who is the author of our respect,
who is the author of our esteem,
who is the author of our reverence,
who is the author of our awe,
who is the author of our fear,
who is the author of our trembling,
who is the author of our confusion,
who is the author of our shame,
who is the author of our reproach,
who is the author of our dishonour,
who is the author of our disgrace,
who is the author of our ignominy,
who is the author of our contempt,
who is the author of our scorn,
who is the author of our derision,
who is the author of our mockery,
who is the author of our ridicule,
who is the author of our laughter,
who is the author of our scornful looks,
who is the author of our scornful words,
who is the author of our scornful actions,
who is the author of our scornful thoughts,
who is the author of our scornful feelings,
who is the author of our scornful desires,
who is the author of our scornful passions,
who is the author of our scornful affections,
who is the author of our scornful intentions,
who is the author of our scornful resolutions,
who is the author of our scornful promises,
who is the author of our scornful threats,
who is the author of our scornful vows,
who is the author of our scornful oaths,
who is the author of our scornful curses,
who is the author of our scornful prayers,
who is the author of our scornful supplications,
who is the author of our scornful petitions,
who is the author of our scornful requests,
who is the author of our scornful demands,
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who is the author of our scornful rights,
who is the author of our scornful duties,
who is the author of our scornful obligations,
who is the author of our scornful responsibilities,
who is the author of our scornful accounts,
who is the author of our scornful judgments,
who is the author of our scornful verdicts,
who is the author of our scornful sentences,
who is the author of our scornful decrees,
who is the author of our scornful laws,
who is the author of our scornful statutes,
who is the author of our scornful regulations,
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who is the author of our scornful prohibitions,
who is the author of our scornful restrictions,
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who is the author of our scornful boundaries,
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who is the author of our scornful gates,
who is the author of our scornful doors,
who is the author of our scornful windows,
who is the author of our scornful roofs,
who is the author of our scornful floors,
who is the author of our scornful ceilings,
who is the author of our scornful walls,
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S E R M O N XXV.

THE GOVERNMENT
OF
THE PASSIONS.

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THE GOVERNMENT

THE PASSION

S E R M O N XXV.

And he said go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so when Elijah heard it—that he wrapped his face in his mantle.

1 Kings, xix. 11, 12, & former part of 13.

ONE of the principal causes of the little progress which true religion has made among mankind, is the *debasing* idea annexed to it by the scorner, the in-

SERM.
XXV.

VOL. II.

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SERM.
XXV.

fidel, and the worldly-minded. It is their custom to represent it merely as a well-contrived restraint for the *vulgar*; which obtains its influence only on *illiberal* spirits, who are to be kept within the pale of duty by vain terror, and superstitious apprehension: but that the man of true *greatness* and *elevation* of mind is a law unto himself; that equanimity and dispassionateness are inconsistent with genuine honour; and that our *own feelings*, and not what others may determine concerning the fitness of things, and the obligations of morality, must regulate the conduct of a gallant and heroick character: in one word, that pride, impatience, resentment, and revenge, are infallible sources of glory—that religion is a debasing principle, and that conscience makes cowards of us all. This is modern honour: the brazen image that the world hath set up; and which all people, nations, and languages are commanded to worship, on pain of being cast into the burning

burning fiery furnace of prophane wit, and infidel satire.

SERM.
XXV.

The effects of these horrible and flagitious principles are already become the characteristicks of the times, in the *higher* scenes of life; and where the evil may stop God only knows. All men are naturally influenced by the opinion which others—especially their superiours—entertain of their conduct; and seldom attach themselves to a party, which they observe has attracted the ridicule and contempt of their fellow-creatures. Hence arises a great and evident necessity for the Christian moralist by all means in his power, to rectify those false notions, which have been infused into many, that a universal subjection to the precepts of religion is an evidence of a poor and ignoble mind:—to convince us, if possible, that religion, so far from imposing any duties that are injurious to real dignity and elevation of soul, is, on the contrary, the only fountain of true glory; by establishing reason on the throne of the

SERM.

XXV.

heart, making us masters of ourselves, and enabling us to give laws to *our own passions*; which is a state infinitely more glorious, exalted, and godlike than all the noisy exploits of heroism, which but too frequently scatter horror and distraction through a trembling world.

This I apprehend to be the doctrine symbolically inculcated by that sublime representation contained in my text. The prophet Elijah, who seems to have been a man of a very warm and impetuous temper, had been divinely commissioned to denounce the wrath of God against the children of Israel for their abominable idolatries. But finding all his remonstrances, prophecies, and miracles, utterly ineffectual, and his person despised and ridiculed, he abandoned himself to all the fury of intemperate anger. While he was agitated by this tempest of the soul, as it were expostulating with the Supreme Being, who still mercifully withheld the impending judgement, he received a summons to quit
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the cave he had retired to, in order to indulge his burning impatience and indignation, and to stand forth before the LORD, where he had a visible reprimand for suffering his impetuous passions thus to break loose from the restraints of reason: “Behold the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind”—which, like the wrathful tempest in his bosom—“rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the Lord was not in the wind”—there was nothing truly amiable, great, and good in that furious exertion. “And after the wind an earthquake”—agitating the bowels of the soil, as the prophet’s were by his own tumultuous passions—“but the Lord was not in the earthquake”—the Divine glory was not manifest in this. “And after the earthquake a fire”—resembling the blasting of his indignation—“but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice”—the soft whisper of reason, the gentle pleadings

SERM.
XXV.

of patience and mercy, which are truly divine, and witness the presence of God in the human heart. "For so it was (as the sacred record proceeds) when Elijah "heard it"—and happy they who will be prevailed on to hear it—"that he wrapped "his face in his mantle"—to testify his confusion and shame in being surprised in that indecent temper of soul, and his reverence for the Divine appearance.

Favoured with your patience, I shall take occasion from this animated and affecting scripture, to prove,

In the first place, that the true dignity of human nature consists in the proper government of our passions.

After which I shall endeavour to point out the principal means conducive to that great end.

And may God assist both you and me, my brethren, in the important argument!

Now

Now the dignity of that man, who has atchieved a victory over his own rebellious passions, and reduce them to obedience to the law of reason, stands, like a triumphal arch upon these two main columns—the arduous *difficulty* of the work, and the infinite usefulness of it. Well, therefore, may the Apostle denominate a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, and all who resemble him, of so great price—an *incorruptible* ornament.

SERM.
XXV.

And if the glory be proportioned to the *difficulty* only, we may form some estimation how great that must be, by reflecting on the inconsiderable number of those who, in the best of times, have been found to regulate the movements of their own hearts. Our passions have been emphatically termed the elements of life. The resemblance is particularly striking in this, because, like the wind and the fire in the prophet's vision, they sometimes seem superior to all human government. Even

SERM.
XXV.

the softer affections, as they are called, have been known to break in pieces the laws of God and man—those rocks and mounds of society, and violently scatter their flames through a whole weeping and desolated country. Universal history is little more than a record of the triumphs of passion over reason and justice; and the revolutions of mighty empires have seemed but to depend upon the nod of Ambition, Covetousness, Lust, or Revenge. Men, under the impulse of these, have been found as intractable as the storm that agitates the ocean, and as dangerous as the howling wilderness. Philosophy and religion have exerted their soothing powers in vain—they have obstinately refused to *bear* the voice of the charmers; charm they never so wisely. Nay the terrors of death have been set in array before them to no purpose—they have been known to rush headlong into immediate and certain destruction only to obtain a momentary

momentary gratification of their lust or their revenge. SERM.
XXV.

What have been the lives of the wisest and best of those, who have reflected true dignity on human nature? What, but one continual, unintermitted struggle against the corruptions of their own hearts. Alas! all things within, and without seem to have conspired against them. On every side, examples start up which at once both entice them to evil, and confirm them in it—surrounded by objects that unceasingly irritate their passions, if they would fight the *good* fight, they have found the whole celestial armory little enough to preserve them unharmed from the assault of some temptations, and finally render themselves victorious over them. The breast-plate of Righteousness, the shield of Faith, the helmet of Salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, and all those Divine succours, which are offered to the Christian Militant, would never have been prepared, if
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SERM.
XXV.

the danger arising from our own passions had been inconsiderable, or the conquest of them easy. But this is but the first difficulty in the conflict; that the world and all things in it are against us.

The worldly hero or conqueror is still the object of our highest admiration: but how much the spiritual is superior to him, must be evident from this consideration; that while the former only follows his natural temperament, and constitution, the other is forced to take the field, in opposition to both. There have, indeed, of late years been some foolish martyrs to modern honor, who have provoked their private enemy to a duel, and rushed upon his sword, conscious, at the very time, that their conduct was utterly irreconcilable with every principle of justice and common-sense. But the glory of such is generally as short-lived as their principles are ridiculous, wicked, and contemptible. Their preposterous reputation is like the remembrance of a guest, that tarrieth
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but a day. And whether they die by the hands of each other, or by those of the common executioner, they must be convinced, is of very little consequence to society. That other nuisance, however, the publick conqueror, follows the dictates of his own heart. Naturally fearless and undaunted he pursues that glory which he covets, and is crowned with unfading laurels, because he has contrived to gratify his ruling passion. But see the peculiar difficulties of the religious hero! With whom does he first declare war but himself? What are the enemies he undertakes to subdue, but his own natural affections? Nay, what is still worse, and inconceivably enhances his hardships, he has at one and the same time, a variety of enemies to enter the list with, each of *different*, or rather of *contrary* interests. So that while he is, with trembling solicitude, fortifying himself against one, he is unavoidably exposing some weak parts of his bosom to the assaults of another. Interest,
honour,

SERM.
XXV.

honour, and pleasure imperiously call him here; duty and conscience detain him there. He continually sees and feels a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind; and utterly unwilling to be subject to the law of God. And if with such complicated difficulties to struggle with, he nevertheless comes off with victory; let any man who has accustomed himself to militate against his own heart, as it were, to pluck out his own eyes, and cast them from him, that they may not guide his soul to dishonour—to cut off his right hand, that it may not be an instrument of impurity or revenge;—let any humble Christian appreciate the glory of such a character.

Let it be further considered, the motives to worldly honour are present, active, and naturally adapted to our corrupt taste; being borrowed from objects that continually appeal to our senses:

But is this the case in our Christian warfare? By no means. Our motives are indisputably

indisputably greater; and where sound reason holds the balance, must certainly preponderate. But tell me, my brethren, where are those exalted spirits under heaven, upon whom they are permitted to obtain their full influence? *Moses*, the meekest man upon earth, was yet once transported with excess of anger. *Job*, that completest pattern of patience, under the pressure of his complicated sorrows, suffered some expressions to be extorted from him, which he understood not. The adultery of *David*—the idolatry of *Solomon*—the perfidy of *Peter* and the cowardice of all the apostles—demonstrate the infinite necessity of our being always upon our guard, lest in the whirlwind, and fire and earthquake of our own passions, both our souls and bodies are ruined in a moment.

S E R M.
XXV.

Is the general conduct *better*, at the present day? I tremble for my country—I blush for human nature, when I think of the force of our religious motives, and
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SERM.

XXV.

our almost universal neglect of them. Freedom and liberty are for ever in our *mouths*, while in our *lives* we are the most contemptible abject slaves to our own brutal and devilish passions. Witness our publick and private robberies—gamings—usuries—malicious lyings of party against party—our abominable whoredoms, adulteries, divorces—duellings, and self-murders. Are we Christians? are we rational creatures? The putrid steams of our lusts have almost extinguished the lamp of God within us, and the altar of our hearts is defiled by our daily sacrifices to sensuality.

Besides, those objects which ought to determine our choice, because they are spiritual and heavenly, yet as they are, *therefore*, future and invisible, we may lament, but cannot deny, will hardly influence even the best and wisest among us—the ten righteous who save the city—like those which are sensible and present.

If, indeed, we could unbar the adamantine gates of heaven, and actually contemplate

contemplate the unspeakable delights of the blessed—as was permitted to some of the Apostles of JESUS CHRIST—to despise the poor meagre pleasures of life, in competition with them, would be natural and easy. “But we now walk by *faith*, “and not by sight;” and that divine principle must be diligently, carefully, indefatigably cultivated by continual meditation and ardent prayer, before it has power to render us cool and indifferent to these early indulgencies which are always before our eyes. But if, notwithstanding all these discouragements, we can, by such motives, acquire the mastery of our passions, solicitously co-operating with the grace of God—that *still small voice* within—then must our glory in the conquest be proportioned to the difficulties we have sustained in the combat, and our voluntary *self-denial* be an evidence of the strength and dignity of our minds.

The only question that can arise, is whether a task so arduous and discouraging,

SERM.
XXV.

SERM.
XXV.

raging, so irksome to flesh and blood, be really *necessary*? as I have undertaken to prove it is; because all *uncommanded* austerities, absolutely useless, are as improper candidates for praise as the hair-shirt of the *Papist* or the lancet and knives with which the worshippers of *Baal* disfigured themselves; and were severely ridiculed for their pains by that prophet, to whom the vision in the text is addressed.

And can the *statesman's* sagacity, which is often little more than a systematick refinement upon the crafty wiliness of the fox—can the achievements of the conqueror, which too often commence upon motives of injustice, are inhuman in their progress, and irretrievably fatal as the pestilence in their conclusion; can these, in point of usefulness, be compared to the labours of the spiritual man, which are calculated to protect his fellow-creatures from the deceptions of the one, and the brutality of the other; or rather utterly to extirpate those baneful qualities;

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to reduce the politician to common sense, and the hero to humanity. For, to adopt the language of the Apostle, "if the ministration of *death* be accounted glorious, how shall not the ministration of the spirit of peace and love, and universal benevolence, be rather glorious?" That has a natural tendency to improve and exalt our own nature, and the solid happiness of all about us; to render us acceptable in the sight of that Being, who is incomparably the best judge of all true dignity; while the other is gratifying the malice of fiends, and adding to the triumphs of hell. Some present temporal good is the utmost he can possibly effect.

But let us imagine that by the example or precepts of the true Christian philosopher, reasonable creatures could be prevailed on to be temperate in all things, to keep under their bodies, and bring them into subjection to the law of CHRIST, human society would then be but one uninterrupted scene of satisfaction and delight.

SERM.
XXV.

"Judgement would run down like waters,
"and righteousness like a mighty stream."

Half the evils of life, and all the enormities of our own deplorably-corrupted country spring from the irregularity of our passions.

But were *Anger*, instead of appearing horrid and frightful by turbulent emotions of the breast, and distortions of the face, reduced to its primitive temper; such as it was when man came fresh from the hands of his Creator; preserving a dignity of resentment in the countenance, and commanding a reverential awe in the vicious offender:—"be ye angry, and *sin not*," says the Apostle:

Were *Hatred* excited by vice only, and consistent with pity for the vicious:

Were *Love* without dissimulation, and not inspired by sudden intoxication, driving its votaries to brutal impurity; but refined, constant, friendly, and benevolent:

Did *Fear* never encroach upon the bounds of fortitude, by a slavish dejection

indignityful

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of spirit; nor ever appear but as a monitor, to prevent the doing of an action which might be attended with disgrace or repentance: SERM.
XXV.

If *Hope* were always proportioned to the value of its object, and never degenerated to envy or injustice: Paradise would be regained, and the prophetick kingdom of the Messiah realised upon earth. Nation could not rise against nation, neither would they learn war any more; but their swords might be beaten into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.

But the utility of every moral exercise that has a tendency to produce such an effect must be self-evident. And the possession of such a spirit be universally acknowledged the genuine dignity of man; it restores the soul, that transcript from the Divine image, to its primitive integrity; and, consequently, to its happiness.

Is such a one a *father*? his children rise up, and call him blessed. Is he a *master*? his servants forget all that is irk-

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SER.M.
XXV.

Some in their dependent state, and are exalted into honourable friends. Is then a magistrate? his moderation is known unto all men, and mercy is his diadem and sceptre. Prosperity cannot lift him into arrogance, nor adversity sink him into im- patience and despair.

But even in the private walks of life can such a one—and, blessed be God! I trust there are still many such in the school of Christianity, even at the present day, who have "let patience have her perfect work;" and have dignified their souls by an heroick submission to the will of God; and can he be overlooked and disregarded, while the characters of a Brutus, a Cæsar, or a Cato are dwelt on with foolish admiration and applause? The former, a bloody conspirator, died doubting the very existence of virtue. The second, mad with ambition, scattered fire-brands, arrows, and death around him, and owed his greatness to his country's ruin. And what was the latter but a composition of brutal fullness, cruelty, and pride?

Impatient

Impatient of disappointment, he worked himself up to the resolution of dying by his own hands. His sword being secreted by his weeping friends, who suspected his design, he upbraided them for their tenderness, and requited their love with intemperate reviling and abuse. And when afterwards a poor faithful *servant* ventured to interpose; with unparalleled malice, and devilish ingratitude, he dashed out the poor suppliant's teeth with his fist; and deaf to the most ardent entreaties, immediately fell on his sword. Nay, to prevent the possibility of a cure—with a brutality almost too horrible to be related, he tore open his bowels with his own hands, and rushed out of life with fury, indignation, and rage, into the presence of offended Omnipotence.

Can there be found a rational creature to admire such a character? who does not tremble at the consequence of suffering his passions to break loose from the restraints of reason? How often has one sudden

SERM.
XXV.

SERM.
XXV.

start of *anger* only cancelled a long life of piety—blotted out the works of redemption, and produced blasphemies, murder, despair, and everlasting ruin! And will not this excite our vigilance? Will not this teach us to watch over our own bosoms with unintermitting jealousy and suspicion, lest, at any time, the tempest within should drive us headlong to destruction; and our fiery heart, like a bursting bomb, pregnant with death, destroy itself, and all around us. Must it not convince us of the important truth of Solomon's aphorism—"He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding, but he that is *hasty* of spirit exalteth folly."

Yes! this *short madness* has been productive of more lasting fatal evils to society—to the bodies, the understanding, and the souls of men, than a whole age of penitence could wash away. And unless with the *Mahomedan* Paradise we have adopted their principles too, and brought ourselves to believe, in opposition to the

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text, that the LORD *was* in the earthquake—there is something divine in madness, lunacy, and ideotism; certainly whatever bids fair to effect a cure must be entitled to your most serious consideration.

SERM.
XXV.

Our passions are, indeed, the wings of the soul—may be rendered the instruments of virtue, and the servants of religion. Reason alone is a cold and inactive principle, and without them would but ill qualify us for a station like that of human life, where much is to be *done*, and little to be argued. I shall not, therefore, I trust, be suspected of subscribing to that dream of the Stoics, that our passions are to be utterly rooted out. No: God never made his works for man to mend. Envy, malice, and revenge excepted, which are our *own* workmanship, and pure vice, without any mixture of virtue; these excepted, all our natural passions may be sublimed into those fruits of the spirit, love, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance.

SERM.

XXV.

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I shall beg your attention for a few moments longer, while I endeavour to show how this may be effected.

And the first step towards it is *self-knowledge*; that is, we must frequently sit in judgement upon the motions of our own hearts; and having found out our ruling passion, and considered what were the *places, persons, objects, conversation, circumstances, and occasions*, that have, in former instances, provoked *that* to exert itself; we must religiously avoid them all for the future. A man may as well expect to carry fire in his bosom, and not be burnt, as to put himself in the way of those temptations, and not be inflamed. A little reflexion and sincerity will teach both the *wrathful* and *voluptuous* this rule and its application.

But, perhaps, our situation in life is such that it is absolutely out of our power, not to encounter, again and again, some of these provocations. Our business then is to suppress, to the utmost of our abilities,

H. I.

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the first motions of our irregular appetites—to stifle vice in its very rudiments and beginnings. And happy experience will convince us that all our bosom-sins, like their great author, may be thus gradually subdued:—“Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you,” is the advice and promise of him that can neither deceive or be deceived. It is our own wilful indulgence that gives them strength; and our negligence in not crushing the egg, that hatches the serpent. All our motions towards sin are but, at first, like some faint sparks of fire, and as easily quenched; but if they are once nourished within, and suffered to spread, they may suddenly burst forth in a conflagration; and then no man can say, thus far shall ye go, and no farther: or, to adopt Solomon’s comparison—“the beginning of wrath is as when one letteth out water,”—like breaking the banks of some mighty river, whose waters shall roar impetuously through the breach, and deluge a whole province: therefore

SERM. "therefore leave off contention before it
 XXV. "be meddled with."

But you will naturally ask, what are the *means* to enable us thus to suppress even an infant passion? The temptation has already taken place, and you feel the cause almost irresistably operating towards its effect. Our wisdom and our safety then consist in changing the conversation, or, if that be impossible, the company; in short, by a vigorous effort to turn our attention to some other object, and gain a moment to listen to the *still small voice* of natural conscience and divine grace. But above all, *wrapping our face in a mantle*, as the prophet did—abstracting ourselves from every *worldly* concern, and sending up our hearts and souls to God, by a fervent ejaculation; acknowledging that "our
 "help standeth in the name of the LORD,
 "who hath made heaven and earth; and
 "beseeching him, for JESUS CHRIST'S
 "sake, to send help from the sanctuary,
 "and with the temptation make a way
 "for us to escape!"

For

For it must evidently appear, in spite of SERM.
XXV.
all the pride of man's heart, that, encountered by such enemies, to fly is victory, and to escape a triumph.

In one word, religious recollection, abstinence, fasting, and bodily mortification, but, above all, *prayer*—frequent and fervent *prayer*, both in publick and private, is the universal remedy. And it is our mighty consolation to reflect, that as this remedy is always at hand, so our very passions, thus inconceivably dangerous in worldly matters, will be here highly instrumental in giving efficacy and success to that, through the merits of a crucified Redeemer.

After what has been said, you will want no commentary on these texts of scripture,
“ he that is slow to anger is better than
“ the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit
“ than he that taketh a city.” “ Blessed
“ are the meek, for they shall inherit the
“ earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit.
“ Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed
“ are

SERM.
XXV.

“are the merciful: and blessed are the
“peace-makers.”

And if these shall still sound as harsh
and unintelligible sayings to the modern
man of honour, the proud, revengeful,
incontinent, and irreligious, let him be
told, the fault is not in his head, but in
his heart.

And may that Being, who is able of the
very stones to raise up children unto Abra-
ham, *soften* their hearts to the acknow-
ledgement of the truth as it is in Jesus!

After what has been said, you will want
no commentary on these texts of scripture,
“he that is slow to anger is better than
“the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit
“than he that taketh a city.” “Blessed
“are the meek, for they shall inherit the
“earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit.
“Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed

SERMON XXVI.

MYSTERIES VINDICATED FROM THE
CHARGE OF INCONSISTENCIES.

SERMON XXVI

MYSTERIES VINDICATED FROM THE
CHARGE OF INCONSISTENCIES

S E R M O N XXVI.

If David then call him Lord, how is he his Son?

Matthew; xxii. 45.

AMONG the many disingenuous arts adopted by the modern advocates of infidelity, none is so commonly used in their writings and conversation, as that of selecting any two particular doctrines of revealed religion, which we cannot reconcile to each other, in every respect, and from thence representing them as inconsistent and contradictory; and, consequently, inferring, that one or both of them, must be *false*.

The coincidence of truth with truth
“(say they) is necessary and eternal. Be-
tween two propositions, therefore, of-

S E R M.
XXV.

S E R M.
XXVI.
“ fered to our examination, if there be any
“ repugnancy, it must be regarded as an
“ evidence of falsehood.”

As their discourses have, of late years, risen to the highest pitch of extravagance, openly attacking the 39 articles of religion, denying the venerable authority of the creeds, and particularly the Catholick doctrine of the holy and most adorable Trinity—I trust I shall need no apology for endeavouring, in obedience to Solomon’s advice, to answer them according to their folly; lest they be wise in their own conceit, and so regard our silence as an evidence of the weakness of orthodoxy, and the strength of infidelity. Now that the very principle they assume is contrary to universal experience, every man must, on a little reflexion, be convinced. Because nothing is more easy to persons long exercised in scepticism, than to invent and urge very specious objections, even to *plain matters of fact*, for which we have all the evidence of our senses. And yet we never admit

admit our inability to answer those objections, to raise a single doubt within our own breasts as to the truth of what we thus relate. All that is really proved by our opponents is this ; that it is easier to *raise* objections, than to *refute* them : and that they depend upon a very miserable *sophism*, or fallacious argument, for their disbelief. For if they would be at the pains to consider, that facts are not therefore in themselves] irreconcilable, because *we* cannot reconcile them :—the distinction would be an answer to the objection. We are plainly asserting that such and such things *are*—they disingenuously shift the question upon us, and answer as if we had been attempting to *account* for the manner, reason, and cause of their so being. Here they generally find us deficient, and from thence think themselves justified in withholding their assent. The former, “ whether a thing was,” is merely a matter of knowledge, in which the plainest understanding can hardly be

VOL. II. X mistaken.

SERM.
XXVI.

mistaken. The other, "how, or by what
" means it was," a matter of speculation,
in which the most improved—such is the
imperfection of human reason—can ad-
vance very little with certainty; nothing
that may not be controverted, or, perhaps,
absolutely refuted. And yet we never suf-
fer ourselves to be disputed out of the evi-
dence of our senses, because there are per-
sons, who, upon such principles, choose
to disbelieve; but we inflexibly persist in
the truth of our relation, not at all dissa-
tisfied that we are obliged to leave the ob-
jection to shift for itself.

Favoured with your attention, I shall
make it the business of my following
discourse to demonstrate that this ought to
be our conduct with respect to the doc-
trines of revealed religion; in which,
when we have received all the evidence the
nature of the thing is capable of, no ob-
jections ought, upon the principles of true
reasoning, to have any weight with us.
We may here turn the favourite topick of

our opponents against themselves; and since the arguments by which we were convinced of any doctrine of Christianity are *true*, the objections which they urge against it need give us no uneasiness, because however forcible they may appear, they are, and necessarily must be false.

SERM.
XXVI.

The sacred historian informs us that our Divine Teacher, being in the temple at Jerusalem, the *Sadducees*, or free-thinkers of those times, who denied the immortality of the soul, and a future state, which our blessed LORD had mightily insisted on, stood forth publicly as his opponents. Instead of examining with him the evidence of those doctrines which he taught, they likewise employed themselves in preparing their *objections* against them. They invented a case of a woman, who had successively seven brethren, or persons of the same tribe, for her husband; and then with an air of triumph demanded whose *wife* she should be of the seven, in that future state for which he asserted the

SERM.
XXVI.

whole race of mankind was reserved? The difficulty, or rather the impossibility of answering this question, they no doubt depended on, as equal to a refutation of the doctrine itself: although it were demonstrable, from that very scripture, which they themselves acknowledged to be the infallible word of God; as he presently afterwards shews them. The whole force of their objection proceeding from the inextricable confusion in the several relations of men, which they imagined must be the consequence of subsisting together in a future state; he, indeed, in merciful condescension, convinces them arises entirely from their ignorance that those relations will cease after this life—that of husband and wife, in particular, being only necessary for this world.

Soon after this, as if to convince them and all others, that *difficulties* in a doctrine could not be urged as arguments *against* it, he asks the Pharisees their opinion concerning the Messiah, or Saviour of the world;

world; particularly whose *son* he should be, according to those Scriptures which they universally believed? They answered they knew he must be the son of *David*. The same Scriptures then, he reminds them, represent David as acknowledging this very person, who was his son, to be his LORD, and, in all respects, infinitely his superior. They could not but acknowledge both these to be certain and indisputable truths; and yet when he applied to them to *reconcile* the apparent inconsistency, “no man was able to answer him a word.” They must, therefore, necessarily be convinced, that it was possible for two doctrines to be both equally true, and worthy of all acceptation, between which we may not be able (through the imperfection of human reason) to discover any correspondence, or even invent a mean to reconcile them to each other.

They had repeatedly examined the evidence of the sacred Scriptures; were convinced, beyond the possibility of rational

SERM.
XXVI.

doubt, that they were the word of God himself—that is of a Being of infinite wisdom, who, therefore, cannot be deceived, and of unerring truth, and therefore cannot deceive. So that they knew, and were sure, upon the best evidence the soul of man is capable of, that whatever doctrines are contained in those books must necessarily be consistent with each other: though the united sagacity of all mankind should not be able to bring them to a perfect harmony, because they may advance some truths of so sublime a nature, as to transcend the present powers of human reason. CHRIST, according to the flesh, was the son or descendent of DAVID, but as he had a *Divine* nature, as well as a human, he was also, at the same time, his *Lord*: or, in the language of the church, “ the
“ right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our LORD JESUS CHRIST,
“ the son of GOD, is *God* and *Man*; GOD
“ of the substance of the Father, begotten
“ before the worlds, and man of the substance
“ stance

“ stance of his mother, born in the
“ world; perfect God and perfect Man.”

SERM.
XXVI.

How he could be both God and Man is quite another separate independent question, and our inability to explain this union is no more a reason for disbelieving than it is to doubt our own existence, because we cannot explain how a spiritual immaterial soul is united to, and acts upon a gross material body. The latter, we universally admit, without once attending to any of the objections arising from the inconsistent and irreconcilable natures of flesh and spirit, because every thought, word, and action of our lives is a demonstration of it: the former we *believe*, though our reason may not be able to *account* for it, because we have the testimony of God himself. And as long as the evidencies of the infallible truth of Scripture, arising from miracles, prophecies and their completion, shall remain unimpeached; *so it is written* is a sufficient answer to all the insinuations, cavils, objections, and ar-

SERM.
XXVI.

guments of infidelity. The Christian appeal must for ever lie to the law and to the testimony, if we *Speak* not according to this word—if all our religious enquiries be not regulated by them, it is because there is no light, no true wisdom or knowledge in us. The ingenuous spirit of the *Bereans* was evidenced, not by their endeavours to argue out divine truths from the mere principles of reason and philosophy, but in searching the *Scriptures* daily, whether those things proposed by the Apostles were so.

Another argument that an apparent inconsistency between two doctrines is no reason for rejecting either, may be taken from those scriptures which represent the same son and Lord of David as both exalted and depressed, triumphant and afflicted. Isaiah describes him, in the 53d chapter of his prophecy, as “despised and
“rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and
“acquainted with grief, oppressed, af-
“flicted,

“afflicted, numbered with the *transgres-* SERM.
“*sors*, taken from prison and from judg- XXVI.
“ment, and cut off out of the land of the
“living.” And yet, in the very same
chapter we are told, “he did no violence,
“neither was any deceit in his mouth,
“that, therefore, he shall prolong his days,
“and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper
“in his hands. He shall see of the travail
“of his soul, and shall be satisfied, that
“God shall highly exalt him, *dividing*
“*him a portion with the great*—that is,
“giving him the heathen for his inherit-
“ance, and the utmost parts of the earth
“for his possession, and rendering him
“their supremest Lord and King, *because he*
“*shall divide the spoils with the strong*, or be
“universally victorious over his enemies.”

These prophecies, you see, are not only
inconsistent, but, apparently, direct *contra-*
dictions: equally so, at least with those
propositions in the creed—“that the Fa-
“ther is God, the Son is God, and the
“Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not
“three

SERM.
XXVI.

“ *three* GODS but *one* GOD. So likewise
“ the Father is LORD, the Son LORD, and
“ the Holy Ghost LORD; and yet not *three*
“ LORDS, but *one* LORD.” Well then,
upon infidel principles they must be false,
and may accordingly be disbelieved and re-
jected. And yet Time, the discoverer of
truth, perfectly reconciled and harmonized
all these contradictions, in the history of one
and the same person, our Lord and Saviour
JESUS CHRIST; and demonstrated that
the prophecies were truly divine, and wor-
thy to have been universally *received*. His
mean and obscure life, the injuries and in-
dignities he submitted to, his ignominious
and violent death, justified the former part
of the description; his wisdom, prophecies,
and miracles, and the amazing success
that attended them, his glorious resurrec-
tion and ascension vindicated the latter.
A plain relation of matter of fact is now
sufficient to obviate every difficulty arising
from the apparent inconsistency or contra-
diction of all the prophets to themselves,
and

and to each other. Take it in the words of St. Paul—"CHRIST JESUS," says he, "made
" himself of no reputation, but took upon
" him the form of a servant, and was made
" in the likeness of the meanest of the sons of
" men—and being found in fashion as a man,
" he humbled himself, and became obedient
" unto death, even the death of the
" cross. Wherefore God also hath highly
" exalted him, and given him a name,
" which is above every name, that at the
" name of JESUS every knee should bow,
" of things in heaven, and things in earth,
" and things under the earth, and that
" every tongue should confess that JESUS
" CHRIST is *Lord*, to the glory of God
" the Father." They testified before
hand (says St. Peter) the *sufferings* of
CHRIST, and the glory that should follow.

SERM.
XXVI.

These examples alone are sufficient to demonstrate, how deplorably those vain reasoners are mistaken, who argue against the truth of a doctrine, because it is hard to be understood; or, for a time, impossible

SERM.
XXVI.

fible to be thoroughly explained. The inconsistencies they attribute to them are evidently not existing in the doctrines themselves, but are created merely by our imperfect apprehension of them. We see but in *part*, and know but in *part*. A person, who beholds the most beautiful objects through an improper Medium, or with a weak and disordered sight, may think them irregular, distorted, and deformed; but, should he attempt to convince the rest of the world that they really were so, he would certainly become ridiculous—we should tell him, the fault was not in the objects themselves, but in his own eyes. And upon the whole, it will, in almost every instance, be discovered, that the most plausible arguments of infidelity against the mysterious doctrines of religion, consist entirely in this irrational and absurd practice of opposing ignorance to knowledge. And 'tis no inconsiderable consolation to reflect on what the history of mankind has so abundantly evinced, that those, who
were

were mighty in the Scriptures, having studied and searched them with diligence and capacity, have unanimously acknowledged all Scripture to be given by inspiration of God; and therefore necessary for doctrine, for reproof and correction, or refutation of error, and for instruction in righteousness, or religious wisdom; and that without it, the man of God, or the true worshipper of him, would not possibly be perfect in the knowledge of his duty, or thoroughly furnished unto good and acceptable works. Wisdom is justified of her children. Not that this kind of difficulties is peculiar to *Christianity*, for even natural religion, the favourite scheme of modern infidels, every where abounds with them; as may be shewn in innumerable instances. I shall select one, which though absolutely inexplicable, itself equal to a whole *Atbanasian Creed* of mysteries—has not yet led them to call in question either of the truths from which it arises. “That the supreme being is infinitely wise—that therefore

past

SERM.
XXV.

“past, present, and future, are to him one
“and the same;” consequently that he
knew from all eternity concerning every in-
dividual, whether he would be virtuous or
wicked, they universally admit: and yet that
we are at the same time *Free-agents*, capable
of chusing either one or the other, as we
ourselves shall like best, they will tell you,
there are as many proofs, as there are ra-
tional creatures in the world. Now how
this divine prescience can be reconciled
with human free-will, they have acknow-
ledged to be beyond all their abilities to
explain, think, or conceive. Indeed such
principles, pursued to their full extent,
would lead us even to atheism itself. For,
canst thou by searching find out God?
Canst thou find out the Almighty unto
Perfection?

The great advantages arising from these
observations, I proceed to point out in the
second place.

And *First*, we may learn from hence to
defeat

defeat the arts of infidelity, and vindicate the professors of orthodox faith; or, in the language of the Apostle, both to exhort and to convince the *gain-sayers*—of whom (says he) there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses—teaching things which they ought not. That there are such characters at the present day, our daily conversation and public prints too sadly evince; even our common newspapers are now employed to attack the venerable doctrines of the established church: against all such, these reflexions may be an effectual preservative of our own integrity at least. We *admit* that some articles of our faith have apparent oppositions, which are beyond our abilities to reconcile them; and yet it has been proved that they are not therefore in their own *nature* irreconcilable. So that whatever is plainly revealed in Scripture—that is, for which we have the testimony of God himself—has sufficient evidence of truth

S. E. R. M.

XXVI.

SERMON.
XXVI.

truth, notwithstanding all that can be objected against it on those accounts. "They
" are not proposed to me—should each of us
" say—as objects of knowledge, but of faith,
" and since, though they may be *superior*
" to my reason, and yet not *contrary* to it;
" since it is not expected of me to explain
" or account for them in all respects, but
" only to admit them as truth—that is, to
" believe God Almighty upon his own
" word, and to regulate my conduct by them;
" I cannot pay any attention to those, who
" attempt to darken the divine counsel by
" words without knowledge. I know that
" whatever God doeth, it shall be immu-
" table and for ever; nothing can be put
" to it, nor any thing taken from it.
" And God doeth it, that men should fear
" before him, and be thoroughly instructed
" how to render him an acceptable service.
" Enough is revealed to inform and guide
" my faith—enough is concealed to em-
" ploy and exercise it."

From hence likewise we learn,

SERM.
XXVI.

SECONDLY, the weakness and imperfection of our own reason, and the deplorable folly of trusting ourselves to *that* only, as a sufficient rule in religious enquiries, and the wisdom and safety of humbly regulating them by the infallible light of revelation. To perform a reasonable service unto God, it is before all things necessary that we have *proper* ideas of his nature; lest instead of doing "that
" which is well pleasing in his sight, we
" offer him the sacrifice of *fools*, and so of-
" fend him by our very acts of propitiation.
" Now as no man knoweth the things of
" a man, but the spirit of a man which is
" in him; so no man knoweth the things
" of God, but the spirit of God and he to
" whom that spirit shall reveal them.
How little assistance bare reason can afford in this knowlege, we have a very humiliating instance from the writings of the wisest among the ancient philosophers. These, though assisted by many traditional

VOL. II.

Y

revelations,

S E R M.
XXVI.

revelations, had yet made so inconsiderable a progress in divine knowledge, that the meanest Christian, at the present day, can hardly read their most admired discourses on these subjects without pity and amazement. The utmost effort of their united abilities, was not able to rescue themselves from idolatry. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things—worshipping the creature more than the Creator, who is God blessed for ever."

But whence our superiority? Can we presume ourselves naturally wiser than these venerable names of Socrates, Plato, and Tully? Their abilities in *other* matters will be the delight of human nature as long as it shall continue upon earth. If, then, our knowledge be not *born* with us, it must be acquired by some means out of the reach of those most capable and industrious

trious enquirers. And those are, and can be, no other than *Divine Revelatin*: the utmost that mere reason could perform had been repeatedly tried for many generations by men of the strongest natural sagacity, and the most indefatigable industry, and tried without success. SERM.
XXVI.
“Through the Sun of Righteousness it is,
“that the people that walked in heathen
“darkness have seen a great light; upon
“them that dwelt in the land of the
“shadow of death hath the fulness of
“religious science been liberally poured
“forth.” To the third person of the
holy and adorable Trinity, even the Spirit
of Eternal Wisdom, who spake in the
Scriptures must the glory be given. To
them must we have recourse for that
certain knowledge, which alone can stab-
lize, strengthen, settle us. In searching
them with unwearied diligence will our
reason with all its faculties and powers be
most advantageously, most honourably,
most delightfully, employed. *There may*

SERM.
XXVI.

the meanest capacity learn what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of the LORD, by obedience to which we may secure his love and protection here upon earth, and an eternal weight of glory hereafter in heaven : From which should the wisest of the sons of men presume to depart, and lean on their own understandings, they will certainly err from the faith, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. “ They have forsaken the fountain “ of living waters, and hewed them out “ cisterns, *broken* cisterns,” that will afford nothing but the bitter waters of septicism, remorse, and servile fear ; and the only good office their *boasted reason* can then render, is to conduct them back again, through the painful paths of repentance, to the infallible oracles of God.

It is the glory of Christianity that it is a *reasonable* service ; not an institution which reason could have ever discovered, or when discovered can, in all respects explain or account for ; but yet bringing
such

such convincing demonstration of infal-
 lible truth with it—so thoroughly agree-
 able to the *unprejudiced* soul—so evidently
 perfective of the moral virtue, and true
 happiness of mankind, that, *as it opens*
upon us, we seem rather to recognise or re-
 collect, than to *learn* its momentous doc-
 trines, not superseding the use of our rea-
 son, but, on the contrary, *frequently* ap-
 pealing to it, *always* exercising and im-
 proving it.

SERM.
 XXVI.

A *third* reflection suggested by the text,
 the last I shall at present trouble you with,
 is, that *pride* and *self-conceit*, as they are
 enemies to knowledge in general, so do
 they peculiarly incapacitate us for making
 any progress in *religious* science; and *that*
 not only from their own natural necessary
 tendency, but from a divine judgement.
 As *these* were the motives of the Pharisees
 in commencing publick opponents of our
 divine teacher—that they might *justify*
 themselves—or convince the people of
 Y 3 their

S E R M.

XXVI.

their superiour wisdom ; so first to mortify and humble, by showing them the nothingness of that wisdom, our LORD proposes this difficulty out of those very Scriptures, on their knowledge of which they particularly valued themselves ; and then, to punish their presumption, withheld that explanation which was necessary for setting their minds at ease. “ If the Messias be “ the son of David, how then doth David “ in spirit, or speaking by the Holy Ghost, “ call him LORD ?” Had they been thoroughly instructed on this subject only, admitting the *divinity* of the Saviour of the world—it would have gradually opened their eyes to the saving acknowledgement of eternal redemption. But the secret of the LORD is with them that approach with reverence and humility, and he will show them his covenant. The Pharisees were notoriously deficient in both ; to *them*, therefore, the Gospel was preached only in parables and dark sayings, that “ seeing they might not see, and hearing “ they

“they might not understand.” While
unto the Disciples, who were disposed to
receive with *meekness* the engrafted word,
it was given to know the *mysteries* of the
kingdom of heaven.

SERM.
XXVI.

If ever the robe of *humility* was necessary for the children of men, it is certainly when God himself, from infinite mercy, condescends to become our teacher. It is the property of that virtue to render us *obedient*—ready to *practise*, as well as understand, whatever shall be revealed unto us. And if any man will do his will—is really disposed to *obey* it—he shall soon know of the doctrine whether it be of God. A virtuous life is naturally accompanied by an orthodox faith. Without that, although it were possible for us to speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, we should still be but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and though we had the gift of prophecy, and could understand and *explain* all mysteries, and had all knowledge and faith, so that we

SERMON.
XXVI.

could remove mountains, it would profit us nothing. In one word; unless our knowledge make us *better*, as well as *wiser* than other men, it will serve only to aggravate our crimes, and render us more inexcusable, when we shall appear together at the tribunal of God. And it is a mighty consolation to reflect, while we are in this state of mental imperfection, that he to whom we shall render account, will sooner pardon a thousand faults of the head than one of the heart.

Let us, therefore, my brethren and fellow-Christians, instead of affecting to be wise above what is written, or doating about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings, to the destruction of Gospel charity and peace:—let it be our study to cloath our souls with the amiable graces of a Christian spirit;
 “ giving all diligence to add to our *faith*
 “ virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and
 “ to knowledge temperance; and to tem-
 4 perance

“perance patience; and to patience god-
“liness; and to godliness brotherly kind-
“ness; and to brotherly kindness charity,”
unfeigned love, compassion, and benevo-
lence to all mankind. For if these things
be in us, and abound, God himself hath
declared, we shall not be barren, or un-
fruitful in the KNOWLEDGE of our LORD
JESUS CHRIST.

SERM.
XXVI.

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for printing of Dec ; 1904

...and to conduct brotherly-kind-

...and to brotherly kindness, charity,

unpublished work, comparison, and review.

James to all concerned. As for the other things

be in my old shoes, too dimly hat

definitely, we shall not be deterred, or un-

United in the knowledge of our Lord

1944-1945

100

SERMON XXVII.

S U M M A R Y
OF
SCRIPTURE EVIDENCE.

11
SERMON XXVII.

SUMMARY

SCRIPTURE EVIDENCE

111

S E R M O N XXVII.

*Holy men of GOD spake as they were moved
by the Holy Ghost.*

2d Epist. Peter, i. latter part of 21.

THE perfect establishment of our
faith, and the religious confidence
of the soul depending entirely on a firm
and rational conviction of the truth of the
sacred Scriptures; to collect, illustrate, and
enforce the evidence of their Divine Ori-
ginal, for the confusion of deism and in-
fidelity, and the comfort of believers, is
evidently, at the present day, one of the
highest and most indispensable duties of
the Christian monitor.

The pride of philosophy, the presump-
tion of ignorance, the arrogance of self-
conceit, and, above all, that deplorable
indisposition

SERM.
XXVII.

SERM.
XXVII.

indisposition to religion and spiritual objects, which are the distinguishing characteristics of the times, superadd an occasional importance to the perpetual expediency of the enquiry; lest, while the apostate is permitted to triumph, the faithful should be discouraged.

Instead, therefore, of attending to the particular objections of the modern sceptick, which are become almost as numerous as they are irrational and inconsistent; I shall endeavour to establish before you, in the shortest and plainest manner, this great and interesting proposition, which, indeed, has been already a thousand times demonstrated at large; that the books of the sacred volume of Revelation bear every mark, character, and impression of that Being, whose wisdom is infinite, and whose goodness is equal to his wisdom. From whence it will follow, by evident and unavoidable consequence, that every thing contained in that volume is infallibly true; and therefore that every contradiction

tion and objection to it may, even without examination, be rejected as false.

SERM.
XXVII

To arrive at this demonstration, I shall collect my proofs,

First, from the very stile and manner of the holy Scriptures;

Secondly, from the importance of the events and miracles recorded in them;

Thirdly, from the singularity of their subject and doctrines;

Fourthly, from the admirable harmony which subsists among the several writers of them; however distant in time and place; however unconnected with, or unknown to each other;

And lastly, from that illustrious adorable spirit of prophecy, which pervades, dignifies, and animates the whole.

The time would fail me should I attempt to speak to half the extent of these topicks: I shall, therefore, only suggest
a few

SERM.
XXVII.

a few leading ideas on each, to be improved by your own meditations; and yet sufficient to show that our faith in the holy Scriptures is built on such an impregnable foundation of rational evidence, that, till our understanding shall be corrupted and incapacitated by our sensual passions, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

That there is an incommunicable peculiarity in the style, manner, and composition of the sacred volumes—a certain union of the *sublime and simple*, unimitated, and inimitable by the art of man, which discriminates them from all other books in the world, every capable examiner has acknowledged. Now even this is, of itself, an overpowering evidence, at the very outset of our enquiry, that man is not the author of them. If we turn to all the innumerable volumes of classical antiquity, poets, philosophers, and historians, it is impossible to read their most admired discourses on religious topics, the Deity, and his providence, without blushing

blushing at their ignorance;—without being shocked at the grossness of their conceptions, and the inadequacy of their language. Their accounts of the formation of the world, the creation of man, and the commencement of all things, is always so unsatisfactory, and sometimes so absolutely childish and absurd—although it is clear they had some traditionary knowledge of the books of Moses to proceed upon; their most elaborate dissertations on the immortality of the soul, so perplexed, dark, and indecisive, that common sense, as it were, tacitly enters a protest against all we read in them; and we are sorry to see the elegancies of speech, and the brilliancies of wit wasted (like embroidering upon a cobweb) on things without weight, strength, or solidity.

But are there any marks of this futility in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles? Every thing they say witnesses the presence of a Superior Intelligence. Their eloquence is not the eloquence of man.

SERM.

XXVII.

The schools of science have not yet even investigated the rules of their composition; and though their manner is as *new* as their matter, and unlike to all we have before been accustomed to approve and admire, as the standard of excellence; yet does it immediately win its way to the heart, seeming not to be learned, but recollected, as the original language of the Creator to his creatures. Our learned prejudices are annihilated before it: it affects us, like its Author, as something unparalleled and transcendant, not to be judged of by analogy, but communicated only to be believed and obeyed.

Take, for example, the very first sentence in your bible, and mark the decisive and majestick simplicity of the language: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."—A passage in which there are more ideas than words, and every idea a study for life. It is the style of one, who, in all the conscious dignity of truth, and therefore, without descending

scending to any of the artifices of preface, or conciliatory introduction, speaks immediately to a fact indisputable, which, to be believed, needs only to be revealed, and which, in and by its very manner of revealing, shews a divine foreknowledge, that sufficient was then said to lay the foundation of all religious faith, throughout every age of the world.

SERM.
XXVII.

The sublimity of a subsequent passage broke through the prejudices of a heathen and idolater, and extorted from him that tribute of praise, which he withheld from its Divine Author: "And God said let
"there be light; and there was light!" Who does not see, that to have added but a single word more would have been unworthy the greatness and incomprehensible majesty of the Supreme Being?—Events produced by the interposition of *divine* Energy are above the power of eloquence to dignify them:—"He spake the
"word, and they were made." On such occasions, all amplification or diffusion of

SERM.
XXVII.

language is frivolous and vain. Omnipotence cannot be exalted; Infinity cannot be magnified; Perfection cannot be improved. These are ideas too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, too majestic for ornament.

And if these passages are really adequate to our most exalted notions of the Deity, while those of all other writers only degrade their Gods into men, and violate the supreme nature, by gross and indecent representations; may not their claim to Divine inspiration be, from thence only, proved to be reasonable and just, since God only can describe himself to man. And when our souls and all their faculties rest perfectly satisfied in the description, receiving and embracing it like the first principles of common sense: can there be a doubt that he who formed the one dictated the other? For, whether our original apprehensions are calculated for the description, or the description for our apprehensions, the coincidence and harmony

mony betwixt them must be the work of Omniscience.

SERM.
XXVII.

There are more than a thousand such passages, which might be adduced to illustrate the truth of this observation; but the topicks which I have proposed for this discourse are too numerous to indulge me any longer on the present. And indeed all this light of evidence is so eclipsed by that effulgence of Divine glory, which beams forth from the *occurrences* and *miracles* recorded in Scripture, that it is but as a bright morning to the full blaze of meridian splendor.

Hence it is, that against these occurrences and miracles, all the arts of infidel sophistry have been incessantly directed. If the fact related cannot be accounted for, by the ordinary laws of nature, rather than admit the *Divine* interposition, though the occasion be to rescue the whole race of mankind from idolatry and the power of the devil; they choose to withhold their assent, under pretence of preferring ex-

SERM.
XXVII.

perience to testimony. For example; we read that once, on a certain great and adequate occasion, "the sun stood still"—to use the popular language—"in the midst of heaven, and halted not to go down about a whole day." Their experience, it seems, supplies them with nothing similar to this prolongation of light; but is that a reason for incredulity, when that same experience, every hour of their lives, witnesses to them a greater instance of God's adorable power, in keeping the whole host of heaven in their due and regular movements? Or, is it more difficult to conceive brute and insensible matter at rest than in motion?

So when the earth opened and swallowed up the tents of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram; can these men reasonably plead, that it is too wonderful for belief, while they admit that the same power has founded the whole world upon nothing, and that this dense and ponderous system of nature has hung for innumerable ages, self-balanced,

lanced, in the midst of infinite space? SERM.
Indeed, upon such principles, creation it- XXVII.
self is incredible: for their experience can
offer them nothing analogous to such a
commencement of material being; and
yet they must either admit the Mosaick
testimony, or reject that of their own
senses. Again, we read and believe, that
a universal deluge once overspread the face
of the earth; and can this be thought too
hard for that Agency, which has ever since
kept the immense congregation of waters
within their appointed bounds? Perhaps
the suspension of that Agency, but for a
single moment, is fully adequate to so asto-
nishing an effect. And is six thousand
years' unintermitted attention less an object
of wonder, than a moment's relaxation of
it? See the absurd inconsistency of a de-
termined infidel! and remember, with
holy gratitude, that there is no doctrine
equally repugnant to reason, imposed upon
you by any articles of our faith.

S E R M.
XXVII.

So with respect to the great and interesting doctrine of the resurrection of the dead; with what grace or ingenuousness can they who pretend to believe that God originally made all men out of nothing suggest a doubt whether he can re-make them out of something?

We allow the events, recorded in the holy Scriptures to be singular, uncommon, astonishing: so likewise is the Author of them:—and as there is no disproportion between the works and the Worker, we cannot but regard that circumstance as an illustrious demonstration of their authenticity; and while the Deist refuses to believe, because they are so great, we believe for that very reason.

The Bible is the history of God's providence; in which we see him not only establishing the general laws of nature, but, upon important and adequate occasions, suspending, controuling, and over-ruling them; that uniformity and familiarity may not throw us into insensibility: but
that

that we may every moment of our existence feel and acknowledge our entire dependence on that Being, whose nod can annihilate the universe.

SERM.
XXVII.

And since this conviction is indispensably necessary to the moral perfection of human nature, the book which inculcates it, by every method worthy of God, and suitable to man, has, therefore, another seal of infallible truth.

The *third* species of evidence, arising from the *singularity* of Scripture doctrines, I am content to take up in the very form of the infidel objection—that those doctrines are, in many instances, hard to be understood; in some superior to reason; holding little or no correspondence or analogy with general science. But what follows from this representation? That, therefore, the Scriptures are not the word of God? I trust I shall be able to show you the direct contrary in a moment.

Of

SERM.
XXVII.

Of necessary existence—that is, of being without cause, beginning, or end;—of ubiquity of presence, omniscience, and omnipotence, of infinity and eternity, as we have no adequate ideas, so whatever is spoken or written of them cannot but in some degree be mysterious to us. And since no one needs to be instructed that these are the essential attributes of the Deity; whatever, therefore, is proposed as a revelation of the object of religious worship, may be tried by this rule—if it be *not mysterious*; that is, doth not contain something superior, although not contrary to, human reason; it must, for that very reason, be false.

And if we are not able, at the utmost stretch of our faculties, thoroughly to comprehend, and account for, all that is, nevertheless, in the plainest and most positive terms, revealed in the sacred Scriptures; that itself is a proof irrefragable, that they neither are, nor can be, the work of *unassisted* man. For have we powers to
invent

invent what we have no faculties to conceive? Could that come out of man's mouth, which never entered into his heart?

SERM.
XXVII.

For instance, what correspondence does the doctrine of the most holy and adorable Trinity—what analogy do the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God—his sacraments and baptism, and the last supper, hold with the phenomena of nature, or with any other of the usual means, by which we acquire our ideas? The infidel or deist will tell you, they reject them, because they hold none at all. We, however, being able to point to another source of intelligence, account for the difficulties contained in the doctrine both from the insufficiency of our own faculties, and the transcendant unparalleled nature of the objects; and having the testimony of our senses, that “So it is written;” we see the finger of God in his very writing, and believe him upon his own testimony: leaving it to them to triumph in a philosophy,

SERM.
XXIV.

sophy, which can admit an effect without a cause, and which chuses rather to acquiesce in a palpable absurdity of their own, than admit the only reasonable solution of the difficulty, that ever was, or will be, offered. Could these doctrines be revealed by the *evil* spirit?—the great enemy of God's glory and man's happiness. Their *moral* tendency annihilates the notion at the first glance. If by *men*; were those men good or bad? The *latter* they could not be, for the reason just assigned; and can we admit those to be *good* men, whom we at the same time suppose capable of obtruding such a forgery upon the world; and of dishonouring their God, by imputing inventions of their own to infinite wisdom?

The Apostle's illustration then must be admitted, or the Bible is the only book in the world that has no author at all; “as
“no one knoweth the things of a man, save
“the spirit of a man, which is in him;
“even so the things of God knoweth no
“one but the Spirit of God,” and those
to

to whom that spirit shall reveal them. Our very knowing at all, therefore, is itself a demonstration, in this instance, that our knowledge is infallible; because the only source, from which it can be derived, is *divine*.

SERM.

XXVII.

The same Conclusion meets us in the *fourth place*, when we contemplate that admirable *harmony*, which subsists among the several writers of the Old and New Testament, how distant soever in time and place—however unconnected with, or unknown to, each other.

For, if these are not admitted to have all drawn their intelligence from one and the same “fountain of living waters,” their agreement is utterly unaccountable. For consider—we discover a chain of *prophecies* extending through several thousand years, from the earliest accounts of time, down to the last and latest books of the ancient Scriptures; all manifestly subservient to one and the same administration of Providence. Of this chain almost every

SERM.

XXVII.

every separate link is the workmanship of a different author, not only unconnected with his predecessor, and ignorant of the great original plan and design, but actually delivering out something, the real import and application of which, it is evident, he himself did not fully understand. And yet these detached parts form together so complete, harmonious, and beautiful a whole—such a regular concatenation and mutual adaption of each to each, that we may as reasonably suppose a fortuitous concurrence of atoms made the world, or the stones in the quarry agreed among themselves to build the temple of Jerusalem, as exclude the agency of that Being who alone can imperceptibly influence the words and works of man:—who, having in the councils of his eternal wisdom adjusted the dimensions of a sanctuary large enough to receive every conscious repenting sinner from the creation to the end of the world, distributed the materials in number, weight, and measure, with line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,

as

as the Prophet speaks; that as the *progress* of the work excited the attention of mankind, the *consummation* of it might establish our faith, and secure our everlasting gratitude, adoration, and love.

SER. M.
XXVII.

And had I leisure to trace before you this illustrious edifice of mercy, from the first stone of its foundation, in that prophecy “the Seed of the Woman shall bruise the Serpent’s head,” through its successive stages, rising gradually higher and higher, up to that Chief Stone in the Corner; “Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord;” the unity of the design alone must force from every capable examiner the Apostle’s conclusion; “we know”—are convinced beyond a doubt, “that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,” (or as the words should be translated, no prophecy of Scripture is of the person’s own private utterance, the mere
unassisted

SER M.
XXVII.

unassisted suggestion of the writer's will-
dom) "For the prophecy came not in old
"time by the will," or study "of man ;
"but holy men of God spake as they
"were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Their distance from each other, in point
of time and place ; the difference of their
style, and the variation with respect to cir-
cumstance, which attends their relation of
the same facts ; their sometimes looking
no farther than their contemporaries, or
immediate successors, for the completion
of their predictions, and sometimes, evi-
dently, not understanding the full import
and extent even of their own words ; while
they exclude every suspicion of confederacy,
carry up their writings to that eternal
truth, which alone is consistent, co-in-
cident, and harmonious in all its parts.

But I must reserve a few moments to
speak, *in the fifth* and last place, to the
prophecies themselves.

Of matters future and contingent, de-
pending on the volition, choice, and ac-
tivity

tivity of free agents, it is universally allowed, no created being can possibly form a judgment, or foretel their occurrence, with any degree of certainty and precision. Here the most exalted human wisdom must for ever be attended by impenetrable darkness and profound ignorance. Wherever therefore we find an accurate description of such events; whether the enterprises and successes of particular men, or the various turns and revolutions of families, states, and kingdoms, clearly delivered and recorded many years antecedent to the times, in which they occurred, or the agents themselves were in existence; this prescience is as certain and infallible a criterion of the true God, of him, to whom, only, past, present, and future are the same, as the soul of man is capable of receiving. And they, who have both the prophecies and their completion before their eyes, and can resist the evidence resulting from them, must expect that all candid, rational enquirers will speak of them in

SERM.
XXVII.

SERM.
XXVII.

the Apostle's language, that "the pride
"and vanity of their imaginations have
"darkened their heart"—their habits of
scepticism have superinduced an unnatural
incapacity of acknowledging the most evi-
dent truth, "neither would they be con-
"vinced although one rose from the dead."

You will indulge me with a recital of
two or three instances only, which will
be sufficient to set the reasonableness of
our belief, and the perverseness of infi-
delity, in their proper lights.

When the most high God conde-
scended to manifest himself to Abraham,
and gave him a promise of the land of Ca-
naan; for an inheritance to his posterity.
Four hundred years antecedent to its com-
pletion; and we see the whole interme-
diate time filled up by a series of events,
each apparently casual or fortuitous, and
yet all uniformly co-operating and con-
spiring to the verification of the prophecy,
from the first selling of Joseph by his
Brethren,

Brethren, and the accidental descent of the Israelites into Egypt, to the extermination of the Amorites; the only rational doubt that can remain is, whether the divine *Wisdom* in foreknowing, or *Power* in disposing all things to its completion, without over-ruling the free-agency of man, is most illustrious and adorable!

So the destruction of the altar of Bethel, by Josiah, who is particularly named more than three hundred years before he was born; with all the circumstances attending it:—The captivity of the Jews in Babylon; the number of the Chaldean kings whom they should serve; and their final restoration by a Persian prince, who, as such, could *apparently* have no power at, or even connexion with, Babylon;—the repeated mention of his name both by Isaiah and Jeremiah, above one hundred and seventy years prior to the event;—These are such proofs as cannot

SERM.
XXVII.

be evaded without running into the most monstrous and fatal absurdities.

Add to these examples, that most illustrious prophecy of the Redeemer of the World, that “the days were coming, “when the enemies of the Jewish state “should cast a trench about them—that “they should fall by the edge of the sword, “and be led away captive into all nations, “while Jerusalem should be trodden down, “so that one stone of their magnificent “buildings should not be left upon another;” and trace it to its affecting completion, forty years after, when the most astonishing miseries of sword and famine destroyed millions of the inhabitants, and dispersed the survivors and their posterity, throughout all the nations upon the face of the earth; where they continue to this day a distinct and separate people, while the very situation of the holy city can now hardly be ascertained: and if you think you can account for all this without the interposition of infinite wisdom and power,

power, we are content you shall still doubt of the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, in which these prophecies are contained.

SERM.
XXVII.

But I have done; men of uncorrupted minds will be secured from the contagion of infidelity, even by this imperfect summary of Scripture evidence; and while they see, and feel, and acknowledge, the indispensable necessity they are under to regulate their faith and practice by the doctrines of revelation, as the only source of infallible truth, they will look down with pity on the unconvinced, however exalted by the reputation of subtilty or science. There is but one objection which the arts of sophistry have produced against revealed religion, that needs to give us any uneasiness; and that indeed, though it affect not its credibility, is enough to overwhelm us with the blush of confusion, and agonize our souls with horror; "the sensual, irregular, and immoral lives
" of some of its professors!"

SERM.
XXVII.

The conclusion of the whole in one word is this; the author of our being and future judge has condescended to put a rule into our hands, clearly ascertaining to us his will and purposes; so that as there is now no plea for ignorance, and disobedience is without excuse: equally certain is it, that, "as many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be eternally upon them and mercy: for they are the Israel, or *elect*, of God."

Now therefore to the King Omnipotent, Parent of Men and Angels, and the Redeemer, ineffable and everlasting Love, together with the illuminating Spirit, who spake by the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles, Three Persons and One God, be glory, gratitude, love and obedience, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXVIII.

AGUR'S PRAYER.

SEER MON XXVII

AGUR PRAYER

S E R M O N XXVIII.

*Two things have I required of thee; deny
me them not before I die!*

*Remove far from me vanity and lies; give
me neither poverty nor riches: feed me
with food convenient for me."*

Proverbs, xxx. 7, 8.

THE happiness of the golden mediocrity, or that *middle* state and condition of life, which is equally removed from the dangerous elevations of ambition, on the one hand, and the cold and comfortless depressions of penury, on the other, has been more frequently celebrated than it has been generally examined and understood.

Perhaps, there is hardly an individual, in the present audience, who is not ready

to

S E R M.
XXVIII.

SERM.
XXVIII.

to confess, that the prayer of *Agur* is so precisely the wish of his own heart, that to attain to and realise it, has been the object of every thought, word, and work of his life. But how can these things be? By what medium shall we reconcile such a declaration to sincerity and universal experience? If every man is still feverishly busied in the pursuit of it; then certainly no man thinks himself already in possession of it.

From whence, one or other of these conclusions must inevitably follow; either, that it has no existence at all, but is a mere illusion of the fancy: or else, that many of us are weak and wicked enough to be really enjoying this prime blessing of Providence, without knowing, and, of course, without acknowledging it.

And, in fact, it would be easy to point out a great variety of such in every society whom every man, but themselves, shall, with unanimous suffrage, declare to be in that very situation, with respect to all the solid

solid comforts and conveniencies of life, which every man affects, as the ultimate of his wishes. But should you appeal to any one of these insensible favourites of Providence, expecting that his own apprehensions should harmonise with yours; you will infallibly be disappointed. In the fulness of his sufficiency he is in straits; and cannot yet find leisure to sit down and enjoy his present acquisitions, 'till by study, industry or saving, he shall have added to them something, which, he tells you, is indispensably necessary to his satisfaction. Wait till he has possessed himself of that too; and the want of another something, unthought of before, still agitates his mind, which, like the troubled sea, cannot rest, casting up the mire of discontent, and the dirt of ingratitude. In one word, the result of our enquiries will be a discovery, that we have adopted the fool's definition; that a competency is a little more of the good things

SERM.
XXVIII.

things of the world than any man ever possessed.

If this universal deficiency cannot, without impiety, be attributed to the divine distribution; let us with manly sincerity descend to the examination of our own hearts, our past lives and our present circumstances: and the generality of us will immediately discover that, at the very moment, while we are wishing with the Prophet, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me," we are already in possession of all that he required of the Lord, and so earnestly supplicated him, not "to deny him before he died."

Yes; that our merciful good God and Father has, from the first, faint cry of our helpless infancy, down to the present hour, actually "fed us with food convenient for us," there are as many demonstrations, as there are men now alive upon the face of the earth. And unless we can prove, that he, who "openeth his hand
and

and filleth all things living with plenteousness," hath, on a sudden, "forgotten to
"be gracious," our past experience is a rational security that "he will never leave
"us, nor forsake us," while we repose a filial confidence in him.

S E R M.
XXVIII.

The expectations of *Pride*, or an overweening conceit of our own merit, it is impossible, as it would be improper to gratify: the emotions of discontent, therefore, from such a cause, are both *unreasonable* and *false*. And unless we commence our search after happiness by "removing far from ourselves this vanity, and these lies;" it is but *lost* labour that "we haste to rise up early, and so late
"take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness all our days." We have indulged desires to which there are no corresponding objects in the universe. But this is not all, which such an examination of our hearts will dictate—it will shew us, that our delirious solicitude, our unchristian dissatisfaction, our unmanly repinings,
do,

SERM.
XXVIII.

do, indeed, proceed from our *wants*—but of what? Not of a competence of this world's goods; but of God's grace, which, when we have been busied in the pursuit of fortune, we have too—too often neglected to supplicate, to inspire our affections with that all-sufficient virtue—that abundant substitute for all possible riches, and honours, and pleasures—Contentment. Contentment! without which riches can purchase for us nothing satisfactory; honours are but splendid vanity, and pleasure the death of reason, the grave of peace, and the charnel-house of religion.

That

“Man wants but *little* here below,

“Nor wants that little *long*,”

is a consideration, which, however acknowledged in speculation, will obtain its efficacy only in proportion as the mind is influenced by the great cardinal virtue, which I have chosen the present subject more especially to recommend: Because that is essential to *every* rank and situation
of

of life. And although it pretends not to reside with and silence the importunate clamours of cold, hunger, and nakedness, yet will it effectually preclude those indecent murmurings against Providence, which arise from fantastick and imaginary wants.

SERM.
XXVIII.

Recommending, therefore, all the sons and daughters of real distress, the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind to your benevolent and charitable consideration, that the Father of all may reward your work and labour of love, by opening your hearts to the admission of truth; I shall entreat your serious attention to a few necessary reflexions, which I apprehend, apply to every man's business and bosom.

And *first*, whoever has a suitable apprehension of the Divine Wisdom, Goodness, and Power—that wisdom by which he knoweth our necessities before we ask—that goodness, by which he is always disposed to relieve them—and the power by which

SERM.
XXVIII.

which he is able to do it—will find an inexhaustible source of comfort and rational confidence in those pathetick admonitions of the Saviour of the world: “I say unto you, take no thought” indulge no desponding apprehensions—“for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life”—even every moment of your existence, being the effect of God’s unintermitted agency—“more than meat?”—a more affecting instance of his care than the supply of your daily bread? Yes; every respiration of the breath of our nostrils—what is it but a divine communication? Our bodies, so fearfully and wonderfully made, must evidently be supported by a greater exertion of power than is necessary to clothe them. Our very growth, from infancy to manhood, is a standing demonstration that we are not left to ourselves: “for which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?”

Consider

Consider the inferior animals of creation, and learn, from their experience, your own folly in distrusting Providence.

SERM.
XXVIII

“Behold the fowls of the air; for they
“sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather
“into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. And are ye not much
“better”—more estimable in his sight—
“than they?”

Nay, contemplate the very grass that
you tread under your feet, “and why take
“ye thought”—and are so anxiously solicitous—
“for raiment?” Consider the
“lilies of the field, how they grow; they
“toil not, neither do they spin; and yet
“I say unto you, that even Solomon, in
“all his glory, was not arrayed like one
“of these.”

Receive then, O soul of man! the obvious
conclusion from these familiar instances—
“if God so clothe the grass of
“the field, which to-day is, and to-mor-
“row is cast into the oven, shall he not
“much

VOL. II.

B b

SERM.
XXVIII.

“much more clothe you, O ye of little
“faith!”

Little faith!—or rather, great and grievous *infidelity*, must all they have acquired, by riveting down their attention to the operation of second causes only, even to the exclusion of the Most High God from the universe of his own creation, who can hear these expostulations without blushing for their own degrading scheme of worldly-mindedness!

To expose this source of discontent we must waste a few considerations on the peculiar character of the times in which we live and converse. Let us therefore remember,

In the second place, that if, at any time, it should happen to be the fashion to be *atheistical*, and appear to adjust and prosecute our plans of happiness, without taking counsel of *religious* principles; then many of those very persons, who are already distinguished objects of the divine munificence,

munificence, will be found not only the proto-martyrs of discontent in their own persons, but the corrupters of all within their influence. As they take not the measure of their wants from *nature*, or even their own feelings, but from a standard false and fantastick, which has no real relation to themselves; they have contrived to render their happiness as unstable as the popular air. They exist but at the mercy of the publick; and must ask the report of the day, how it fares with themselves. The approbation of the *polite* is their Urim and Thummim. Their *houses* are builded, not so much with a view to their own convenience, as the sentiments of others. What may be commodious, fitting, and comfortable in the several articles of their *apparel* is but a remote consideration: nay, their very *meats* and their *drinks*, and their seasons for taking them, must be regulated, not by the calls of appetite, or their own taste, but by that of the world. Add to this, that even the

SERM.
XXVIII.

SERM.
XXVIII.

choice of their companions for life, is generally referred to *avarice* and *ambition*, instead of that which alone can render so intimate a union delightful—reciprocal esteem.

And can there be any wonder, that they who have thus stopped their ears to the cries of their own flesh, should live and die in a state of dissatisfaction? Vain is the help of man; and, although nothing less than a miracle of God's mercy can bring them back to nature and common sense, and render them capable of a true use of his creatures; yet this is, perhaps, the very last thing for which they will think of applying.

For if it should happen in *their* time, as it did in that of the author of my text, that a disregard of the Supreme Being, and ridiculing Providence and things sacred are voted genteel accomplishments and the marks of a liberal mind; if religion should be regarded merely as a well contrived restraint for the vulgar; or should it be thought

thought the character of an *ill-bred* man, one that does not *know the world*—to betray the least suspicion of inward piety, or to expect any hints or helps for his conduct, from the opportunities of public devotion; as there can be little doubt but they will adopt the modish extravagance; so there must be little hope of their being ever cured of it, and looking for their happiness, where only it is to be found. But shall God's goodness be arraigned for the miseries of such men? The Psalmist thought this an enormity, which is sufficiently exposed by being barely mentioned. "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then (says he) his heart fretteth against the LORD."

S E R M.
XXVIII.

To be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day, may be very suitable to some ranks of society. It is the long exploded error of superstition and envy to condemn that external shew and magnificence which are the badges of civil honour, and necessary to distinguish

SERM.
XXVIII.

the classes of mankind. But for any really to value themselves on these accounts, and fancy there is a proper personal merit in splendid dress and equipage, or to expect internal satisfaction from the prodigalities and glittering pomp of greatness, is the vice of a mean degenerate soul. And where such a temper prevails, it will infallibly take men off from improving in those intellectual and moral habits, which alone constitute true greatness, and are the real excellencies, or, in other words, the *happiness* of a reasonable being.

There is another infatuation to which such men are extremely liable: in proportion to their vanity and overweening conceit of their own importance, they will, almost insensibly, acquire an unbecoming contempt of others. They will imagine there is as much deference due to their superior circumstances and merits, and be as rigid in exacting it, as if they really were of a different *nature* from their fellow-creatures, and actually belonged to a higher order

order of beings. And thus while they arrogantly sacrifice all the rights of mankind, resulting from natural *equality*, to an advantage merely accidental, which has not only no merit at all in it, otherwise than as it is enjoyed with moderation and a subserviency to the general good; so, being disappointed in their object, their bosoms will become a prey to the tormenting emotions of resentment; and their very advantages render them mischievous in proportion to their capacity of becoming blessings to mankind. Their vassals may, perhaps, submit in agonizing silence; or give up in despair even the desire to please; certain, however, it is that their independent inferiors will either not give themselves the trouble to consult their expectations, or will repay their insolence with contempt. So that their own personal mortifications will not only encrease every day, but will, in some degree, affect the peace of society. It is a complaint of long standing in the world;

SERM.
XXVIII.

SERM.

XXVIII.

“our souls are filled with the scornful
 “reproof of the wealthy, and with the
 “despitefulness of the proud.”

If then you are convinced, that a real enjoyment of life cannot consist with ingratitude to God, and hatred of man; you will easily comprehend why the author of my text was as much afraid of the dangers and temptations of an *affluent* state, as of those of abject *poverty*. Let it only be carefully remembered, that there is no fatality in the constitution of things by which sin and misery are necessarily annexed to either condition.

No; God be thanked, we can still point to many among us, who are as *good* as they are *great*: whose elevation, like that of the sun, serves only to enable them to diffuse a kindly warmth and cheerfulness on all below them, and draw up a tribute to themselves in the united blessings of an obliged world.

And it is the peculiar happiness of the people of this land that they can look up

EVEN

even to a throne for the most illustrious example of virtuous moderation, and a double pattern of public and private beneficence. As far, therefore, as happiness depends on themselves, and the testimony of an applauding conscience, they are eminently happy.

SERM.
XXVIII.

And that God, in his mercy to these kingdoms, may long continue them so, must be the prayer of every unenvious heart; till that of Solomon shall be universally filled among us;—"when the
"righteous are in authority the people re-
"joice"—or are perfectly satisfied.

But still, are not their virtues chiefly estimable on this account; that their very situation exposes them to peculiar difficulties in persevering in them; to every allurements that can throw them off their guard and sink them down into a listless state of security? I must, however, once more repeat it, that there is no imaginable condition of life—high or low, rich or poor—that compels and necessitates any
one

SERM.
XXVIII.

one moral agent to vice, and its inevitable penalties—remorse of conscience and incapacity for self-enjoyment.

Our rank in the world is allotted us by a wise and good Providence, every thing else depends upon ourselves and our own behaviour in it. And most certain it is, that men of the frivolous temper, which I have been describing, would have been almost as *wretched*, though not altogether as *wicked*, if they had been born day-labourers; instead of living, or rather languishing, upon the labours of others. Even the golden mediocrity—too low for envy and too high for contempt—must owe all its thrilling comforts to the mind of the possessor.

Give me leave therefore to remind you,

In the third place, in what this calm sunshine of the soul really consists.

Now the nearest approach to *sufficiency* is to *think* we have enough; and, if it be not in our power to enlarge our circumstances,

stances, to contract our desires. Because, SERM.
XXVIII.
after all that can be done *for* us, or *by* us, {
our actual enjoyment must result, not from
the outward fulness of possessions, but that
inward satisfaction of mind, which seems
to exclude all defects, and represent every
state of life as sufficient to supply our
wants. It is a truth of every day's expe-
rience, that no earthly objects are, of them-
selves, capable of administering solid sa-
tisfaction: but that disposition of soul
which is satisfied of itself, will cover the
deficiencies and frailties of nature from any
too painful sense and anxious observation of
them. And when this philosophick ac-
quiescence is built upon religious prin-
ciples, it will elevate every soul of man
infinitely above those hair-breadth dis-
tinctions, which vanity, and not nature,
has made us so earnestly contend for. It
will fill us with an abstracting hope and
expectation that such a conformity to the
Divine Image will be certainly rewarded
by an admission to the Divine presence,

as

SERMON
XXVIII.

as it already is by the communication of that spirit, who has power to suppress all painful anxiety for things present, by enabling us to anticipate the riches of futurity.

To be *contented* with God's choice for us, is, evidently, the best method to recommend ourselves to his favour; and the consequence of obtaining that will be a nearer and nearer approach, every day and every hour of our lives, to that presence where there is fulness of joy—so that it is exquisite in degree—and to that right hand of Omnipotence, “where there is pleasure for evermore”—so that it is endless in duration.

Happy, therefore—superlatively happy that man, and that man only, who can say with the great Apostle; “I have learned in *whatsoever* state I am, there with to be content.” And the mind, which is thus composed and at peace within himself, satisfied with that portion of enjoyments, which a wise and good

Providence

Providence appoints, is no longer at the mercy of all the changes and chances of this sublunary world: he has nobly emancipated himself from the general servitude to blind and capricious fortune. Equally "without a wish, so mean as to be great," as un-^{scared} by the spectre of pale poverty," he is cool and tranquil enough to relish all the humble blessings of his own state of life. His bosom is at rest; not like the troubled sea violent in its motions, and foul in its appearance; but, like a gentle rivulet, all clear and serene; and exhibiting, as in a mirror, every beauty of the landscape around him, together with the splendor and magnificence of the heavens above.

And it will be of infinite advantage, even to the incurably worldly-minded, to recollect, that such a frame and disposition of mind, by conciliating the favour and esteem of mankind, is most likely to promote their secular interests. Envy, which pines and sickens at another's health,
all

SERM.
XXVIII.

all are in league to counteract. Avarice never appears but to alarm self-love : and ambition cannot be more eager to climb than the rest of the world to supplant it. Whereas, he that is thoroughly disposed to do his duty in that state of life, to which it has pleased God to call him, is almost insensibly permitted—if not actually assisted—to amend and improve it. Honest industry and perseverance, regulated by content, are seldom disappointed of their reward.

But how is this great comprehensive virtue to be acquired ? A short word or two, in answer to that question, shall conclude what I have to offer on the present interesting subject.

The unsatisfactory nature of the riches, honours, and pleasures of this transitory life—the uncertainty of their tenure, and the frailty of life itself, are, no doubt, considerations of great efficacy to wean from an immoderate fondness for them, all who are in their cool, sober senses.

But

But, God knows, this is not the condition of the worldly-minded; and there is but one remedy for their infatuation: they must by frequent and fervent prayer, apply for the succours of divine grace, to sanctify their affections, to renew the faculties of their understanding—to enable them to taste and see how gracious the LORD has already been to them—and to support and bear them up against the different temptations of prosperity and adversity. “If any man lack this wisdom, he must ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not:” who only can qualify them either to abound, or to be abased, with suitable decency and fortitude.

And if this should appear to be almost the only means to which a man of the world has never had recourse; while we account for his disappointments, we may learn to preserve our own souls from the epidemical infection. But this is not all; we have an assurance founded in the everlasting rock of the divine promise, that if

we

SERM.
XXVIII.

SERM.
XXVIII.

we first "seek the kingdom of God, and
"his righteousness"—prosecuting all our
worldly interests in a wise and honourable
subserviency to our spiritual, aware of the
horrible—the unspeakable madness of sa-
crificing conscience to convenience, and
godliness to gain;—then all the real *necef-*
saries of life, at least, shall most certainly
"be added unto us."

And the form of our prayer for these,
cannot, perhaps, be more commodious
than that of my text; "LORD! re-
"move far from me vanity and lies. Give
"me neither poverty nor riches; but feed
"me with food convenient for me;" un-
less it be that admirable and pathetic
ejaculation, which the blessed Jesus him-
self hath taught us; "Father! give us
"day by day our daily bread."

My brethren and fellow-christians;
henceforth "let your moderation be
"known unto all men: the LORD is at
"hand"—to succour your distresses both
of mind and body. "Be ye therefore
"careful," or anxiously solicitous, "for
nothing

“nothing; but in every thing, by prayer SERM.
“and supplication with thanksgiving,” XXVIII.
for the benefits and blessings already
vouchsafed you—“let your requests be
“made known unto God.”

“And the peace of God”—even that
divine and heavenly disposition, “which
“surpasseth all understanding” of the car-
nal man, shall keep your hearts and minds
uninterrupted by the cares and disturb-
ances of the world, “through CHRIST
JESUS!”

May the Father of Mercies seal and
confirm this promise to the souls of all
who hear me this day! Amen and Amen.

To the most holy and adorable Trinity,
the only fountain of life, peace, and
happiness, even Father, Son, and Holy
Ghost, be rendered all confidence, glory,
and honour, now, henceforth, for ever
and ever.

THE END.

6 JY 59

